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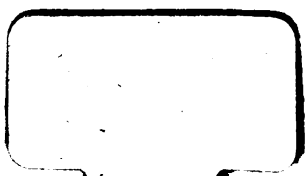
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# KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

*"The same God, Who meteth all things . . .  
Knits together in a love most fond  
Unending wedlock."*

—POEMS OF KING ALFRED THE GREAT  
(Jubilee Edition), p. 198.





WATERED ME THE NEW YORK



*Trask, Kate (Nickel &)*

# KING ALFRED'S :: JEWEL ::

BY

KATRINA TRASK

AUTHOR OF "NIGHT AND MORNING"

"MORS ET VICTORIA," ETC. ETC.

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## INTRODUCTION

65-01-1  
"Seeing that so many uncritical statements on the subject of King Alfred are abroad, it is all the more imperative that we begin our work with a critical survey of the materials at our disposal. We shall find them in many respects disappointingly scanty and incomplete.

" . . . The first place in our list of authorities for the life of Alfred must be given to his own literary works. It is true that the evidence they furnish is mostly indirect, but it is for that very reason all the more secure."

—CHARLES PLUMMER, M.A., *The Life and Times of Alfred the Great.*

HE who would find King Alfred through the mist of the centuries knows the force, the truth of these words.

One searches the Saxon Chronicles ; they are as bare as bones. One searches the pages of Asser, and they contain a heavy coat, of divers threads monk-woven, that hides the Man. One turns to Alfred's transla-

tions of Boethius, Orosius, Bede, St. Gregory's "Pastoral Care," and "The Blossom Gatherings" from St. Augustine, and there one meets the living Alfred, throbbing with eternal life—alive in every personal word interwoven between the lines of the text he translated that he might pass on to his people the "bloom" which he had gathered.

With simple directness "Alfred The-Truth-Teller" reveals himself. First, by the varying subjects which he chooses to translate: History, Travel, Philosophy, Law, Ecclesiastical Literature and Pagan Story, the Church's Legends, and the Ballad of the simple folk; then, by the manner of his translation; but most of all, in his own words which shine out from the text. One apprehends the motive-springs that moved him; one feels the concentration and the many-sidedness, the ambition and the aspiration of this sovereign spirit.

Scholar, Statesman, Poet, Author, Law-giver, Churchman—but in all and through all, a Man. Not a visionary Saint, not a sexless Monk, but a Man of natural body and of quickening spirit met together ; a Man of three-fold nature commingled, as Alfred himself portrayed a Man in these words :—

“ I said that the soul was three-fold because philosophers affirm that it hath three natures. One of these natures is subject to desire ; the second, subject to passion ; and the third, that it is rational. . . . Reason must control both desire and passion, for it is a special virtue of the soul. . . .

“ Thou, O Lord, bringest together heavenly souls and earthly bodies, and minglest them in this world.”



# KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

A

## CHARACTERS

ALFRED . . .	<i>King of England.</i>
CORNEWULF . .	<i>Cup-bearer to the King.</i>
MONFICHET . .	<i>The King's Fool.</i>
CEDRIC . . .	<i>A Thane.</i>
GURTH . . . .	<i>A Neat-herd.</i>
GUNERUNG . .	<i>A Dane.</i>
AN EALDORMAN.	
THE BISHOP.	
ELSWITHA . .	<i>Wife of King Alfred.</i>
ELFREDA . . .	<i>Daughter of Gurth the Neat-herd.</i>
DRIDDA . . .	<i>Wife of Gurth and Mother to Elfreda.</i>
NUMANERA . .	<i>First Maiden to the Queen.</i>

*Courtiers, Thanes, Monks, Ladies of the Court, Saxon soldiers, etc.*

*The Scene is laid in England in the years 878 and 879 A.D.*



# KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

## ACT I

### SCENE I

#### *The Forest of Selwood*

*The day after the Battle of Chippenham, where the English had been surprised in their winter quarters by the Danes. The victory was decisive for the Danes. KING ALFRED has disappeared and the Saxon host is scattered.*

*A lonely part of the forest, silent with the silence of mid-winter. The bare oak-trees and beech-trees are interspersed with many evergreens. To the right, the forest is comparatively open; a path leads to the centre, where the ground rises and the trees stand farther apart. To the left, it is very dense; in the foreground, closely growing shrubs of ever-*

*green form a thicket. For a few moments nothing can be seen but the silent forest.*

*ALFRED, King of England, comes from the right and walks to the open. He is disguised; he wears the rough dress and cap of the Saxon peasant; he takes off the cap, which had been pulled far down over his face, and lifts his head eagerly—with a boyish freedom of movement suggestive of indomitable life; he draws a long deep breath, and looks about him at the forest and at the sunset sky, as though abandoning himself to the refreshment of nature.*

ALFRED. Through glooms of forest and  
through open glade,  
Across the wind-swept, winter-shrouded  
marsh,  
I hurried onward to this secret place.  
Here, I may bide in safety for the night.  
I would that I had brought my harp with me!  
The wild wind chanting in the evergreens,

The myriad branches of the naked oaks—  
 Majestic tracery against the sky—  
 The sunset colours of the glowing West,  
 Stir me to music, songs within me well ;  
 O that I had my harp ! Then would I sing !

*[A voice comes from the thicket.*

ELFREDA. Are you a minstrel, sir ? I  
 pray you, sing

Without a harp—what harp hath singing-  
 bird ?

ALFRED (*looking quickly to the left and to the  
 right*). Who speaks ? Whence comes  
 that voice ?

*[A light laugh comes from the thicket,  
 and again the voice.*

ELFREDA. Deep in the tangle of this greenery  
 I tryst with fairies—and you broke the spell !  
 I will not chide you, for you did not know.

*[A maiden steps out from the thicket ;  
 she is young and very fair. She*

6 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

*is dressed in the simple frock worn  
by the Saxon peasants ; it is home-  
spun like theirs, but, unlike theirs,  
the colour is white.*

ALFRED (*aside*). As innocent as moonlight  
is her face,  
And in her eyes sits purity enthroned.

[*Aloud.*

Friend of the fairies, lovely forest-child,  
What is your name ?

ELFREDA.           Elfreda. Tell me yours.

ALFRED. I am a wanderer. I have no  
name.

ELFREDA. No name, poor wanderer ? And  
have you no home ?

ALFRED. My home is buried in a mist of  
woe.

ELFREDA. Come home with me—our door  
is open wide,  
Huts have no latches—you are welcome there.

My father is the neat-herd—Gurth. In  
speech,

Perchance, he may be rough, but not in deed.

My mother is most kind.

ALFRED. Hast thou no fear, Elfreda ?

Evil men

May wander in the forest—ruthless Danes.

ELFREDA. God walks here, also ; He is  
stronger far

Than any man.

ALFRED (*aside*). O blessed innocence !

I will confide in her ; true is her heart

As white-robed Truth.

(*Aloud.*)

Elfreda, I would fain

Rest close awhile, from every one concealed,

My thoughts for company. I may not seek

Thy sheltering roof ; no man may know of me ;

I trust thy lips to guard my hiding-place.

ELFREDA. I will not tell it—even to the  
birds !

8 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

And I will share with you my secret Bower.

*[Pointing to the thicket.*

Within its round secure you may sleep safe ;  
But you must bend your head—you are so  
tall !—

When you would enter underneath the bough.  
There you will find my treasury—a wing  
As white as hawthorn from a bird that flew  
Inland from the great waters of the sea ;  
A sunrise-tinted shell ; a lonely nest ;  
A truest fairy stone, o'erlaid with moss,  
Whereon the fairies danced in merriment,  
When the dew fell at moonlight in the wood—  
Touch not the stone lest you should break  
the charm !

Will you be gone to-morrow, when I come ?

ALFRED (*smiling*). Not if you come to-morrow, ere I go.

ELFREDA. I rise at crow of cock and cross  
the wood

To seek this open where I find the sky.  
 I love to watch the Sun come from his bed  
 Of rosy dawn-clouds in the joyous East,  
 And put his glistering armour on. Each morn  
 I watch and watch the pallid sky and fear  
 That he will never come again ; but yet,  
 He rises every happy day anew.

The Mass-Priest said I should be at my  
 prayers—

But must one speak to pray? Methinks I  
 pray

Without an Ave when I see the Sun !

Look—Minstrel—at the shadows, where they  
 creep

Beneath the trees like ghosts in winding-  
 sheets !

My mother will be calling—I must go.

[ELFREDA *runs away, waving her hand.*

ALFRED *stands silent until she is  
 out of sight ; then he speaks.*

10      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED. After the hurtling hiss, the desperate din  
Of battle-hours—the onward-moving rush—  
The constant clanging of relentless steel ;  
After long wandering, pursued, hard-pressed—  
This calm-fraught silentness is kind to me.  
My heart is heavy-laden and disquieted,  
But in this refuge, rounded close with green,  
I may contemplate the most dire event  
Of our dark yesterday.

My valiant host  
Is scattered ; a triumphant enemy  
Laughs in derision at our overthrow.  
Ekswitha and my son at Athelney,  
Encompassed by the Danes, in danger wait.  
Black-girdled is the morrow, sable-clad—  
O God of Light! Light Thou my sombre  
path.  
Thy Standard on this Island I must place,  
That every sea-king, jarl and common thrall,



KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 11

In the great heathen army, may know Thee,  
And turn from pagan worship to Thy feet.  
I cannot slink away to live at Rome  
In idle tutelage, as Burgred lived ;  
There *is* a way—a door to victory ;  
It is my quest to find it !

Lo ! A star !

There, in the welkin, gleams the Evening Star ;  
It comes with sudden shining prophecy  
Into the shadow of this twilight dim ;  
Full soon the vasty spaces of the sky  
Will glow with all the marshalled host of  
heaven.

Thus, through the darkness, comes a sign to  
me.

I take the augury. Hope spreads her wings.  
I will hold counsel with the mighty stars ;  
And then, to-morrow, on to Athelney  
To gather forces for a new campaign ;  
Unconquerable England *shall* prevail !

12      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

My arm once more is strong for victory  
Despite defeat, which doth but whet my  
    pride.

I—Alfred—am the crowned, anointed King ;  
The God of Splendour is my Sovereign  
    Lord ;

I will——

    Jesu, have mercy !

My eyes are sightless—and my heart is  
    faint——

    [ALFRED sways and almost falls, but  
    saves himself; leaning against a  
    tree, he passes his hand over his  
    eyes, then to his forehead, where  
    he holds it as he continues speak-  
    ing.

God ! have I fought and held grim death at  
    bay

To meet the silent Angel unaware  
Here, in the lonely forest ? Is this death ?  
We are but as the lilies of the field.

In the same moment that our spirit soars  
 And every power arises strong for flight  
 We are cut down——

Ah ! I remember now !

I have not tasted food since I went forth  
 To battle—I forgot to eat. Must man's  
 Immortal spirit wait on mortal needs—  
 High purpose on corruption ? Enterprise  
 On hunger ? Poor mortality to be  
 Thus hedged about with circumstance of  
 flesh,  
 And choked with dust and ashes !—Ah—I  
 faint——

Our blessed Lord Himself was likewise bound  
 In His humanity—Upon the Cross  
 He suffered thirst—I hunger——

[ALFRED *falls at the foot of the tree*  
*and swoons.*]

SCENE II

*The following morning ; sunrise. The Scene  
is the same as before*

KING ALFRED *is lying unconscious at the foot  
of the tree. ELFREDA is kneeling beside  
him ; she bathes his head with water from  
a small jug. On the ground beside her  
there is also another jug and a small loaf  
of bread ; she looks anxiously at ALFRED ;  
suddenly he opens his eyes.*

ALFRED (*faintly*). Elswitha—Edward—am  
I home ?

ELFREDA.

O no,

Poor Minstrel ! You are here, in forest hid.  
Speak not but drink. Now—take and eat  
this bread.

[ELFREDA *holds the jug to ALFRED'S  
lips ; he takes a deep draught of  
milk. She then gives him the*

*bread, which he eats ravenously ;  
he raises himself and, leaning upon  
his arm, looks into ELFREDA'S  
face ; the colour comes back to  
his cheeks.*

ALFRED. Elfreda !

ELFREDA. Ah !—You know me !

I am glad.

Methought that you were dead, when first I  
came ;

You lay so still, and looked as coldly white  
As my sweet sister looked when in the  
ground

We laid her—Rest her soul !—Then to the  
burn

I went for water, to the hut for food ;  
I feared that you were dead ; but as I bathed  
Your face I prayed that God would let you  
live,

That you would open those fast-closed eyes—

16      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

And then you opened them—He heard my  
prayer.

ALFRED. How knew you that I was an  
hungered, child ?

ELFREDA. I know not how I knew it—but  
I knew ;

Within mine ears I seemed to hear a voice,  
“Give him to eat, Elfreda.” So I ran,  
And brought my morning portion forth to  
you.

ALFRED. In very truth you are a woman,  
child ;

A woman's heart with tender surety knows  
When to pour forth the spikenard of her  
care.

Give me to drink again—

[ALFRED *takes another long draught.*

And let me eat ;

We cannot live without our daily bread  
Whatever our philosophy. Sweet maid,

No fatted calf, no spiced honey-mead,  
 E'er pleased my fancy as this forest feast ;  
 Come, share thine own—eat thou, and drink  
 with me.

[ALFRED *breaks the bread, giving  
 some to ELFREDA, and passes  
 the milk to her ; he rises.*

I am remade, restrengthened by thy grace.  
 The father of all Angels bless thee, child.  
 Thy service I will not forget.

ELFREDA.

And I

Will not forget you, for your face is like  
 Two things I love—prayers and a festal-day.

ALFRED (*aside*). My twofold nature doth  
 the child divine.

(*Aloud.*) A festal-day and prayer ?

ELFREDA.

I think of both.

When I behold your face I seem to kneel  
 In church where Saints are singing—then  
 to be

B

18      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Laughing and running in the wild green wood.

ALFRED (*laying his hand on her head*). Fare-  
well !

[ELFREDA *goes away, waving her  
hand, and singing a melody  
without words.*

ALFRED. Life !    And God's world.    New-  
girt with threefold strength,  
Clothed with new garments of the risen morn,  
Give me but opportunity !

Who comes ?

Footsteps—far off—I know the soldier-tread—

[ALFRED *starts, and listens as steps  
are heard coming through the  
forest ; he goes over to the thicket  
at the left ; he turns up the collar  
of his doublet and pulls the cap  
down over his eyes so that his  
face is almost entirely hidden.  
From the opposite side, CEDRIC  
enters with four Saxon soldiers.*



If they be Danes, I seek Elfreda's Bower ;  
If they be Saxons—yea, 'tis Saxon men,  
And Cedric with them ! Opportunity  
Is here. I will not yet declare myself ;  
I will their temper try and hear their  
words.

CEDRIC. By God in Heaven ! We yet  
shall drive the Danes  
Into the sea, that bore them to our shores.

*[He peers through the trees.]*

Look ! Through the trees ! A soldier in disguise !

FIRST SOL. How know you he is not a  
common churl ?

CEDRIC. A soldier knows another soldier's  
form,  
His step, his movements, though he be disguised.

Ho—there ! Stand still ! Who are you ?  
Answer me.

20 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED (*in an assumed voice*). Good morrow,  
sir.

CEDRIC. *Good* morrow? Nay, not good ;  
It is a bad To-day when Saxon men,  
Yea, Saxon soldiers — for I know your  
stamp !—

Hide in the woods for cowardice. O shame !  
That you, a soldier, should be sneaking  
here,

When England needs each unit to increase  
The sum of her resistance.

ALFRED. I have heard  
The King doth also in close-hiding lurk ;  
He, it is said, ingloriously ran  
From the lost field and hid himself so deep  
That he is lost, e'en to his followers.

ALL. Silence !

FIRST SOL. Dare not to speak of our  
liege lord  
In accents so familiar !

CEDRIC.

By the Cross !

I will avenge the inference. The King  
Skulks not in hiding from a low-born fear ;  
Brave as St. Michael fought he on the field ;  
I saw five Danes beset him at one time ;  
He clove his freedom through the gory way  
His royal sword hacked for him.

At the last,—

But not until the last, when from our ranks  
Each peradventure had been forced to flight—  
When driven from their vantage-ground our  
host

Ran down the slope, confessing their defeat,  
King Alfred vanished — no man knoweth  
where.

All night we sought him, but we found him  
not.

Bitter the fate for us—though he is wise.  
Our valiant King holds in his hand our cause,  
And in his person holds our liberty ;

22      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

He *is* incarnate England ! Well he knows,  
If he were prisoner, despair would fall  
On every Saxon like a blighting frost.  
Somewhere, he waits—not *hiding* but well  
hid—

Weaving upon the loom of his great mind  
A new emprise to save us. We are his,  
And trust him seen or hiding—in the fight  
Or in the forest, watching for his hour.  
The Saxon host has rallied and desire him,  
The King, the heart, the leader of the host.  
It is a wrath-arousing chance to find  
A soldier hidden in a churl's disguise,  
Assailing lightly his beloved name.

ALFRED. I have but said he hides, as I am  
hidden.

CEDRIC. And I have said I would avenge  
that word !

Who art thou, coward, that the King's great  
name,

The King's great deeds, and thine, should be  
compared ?

Were you a churl, I should dispatch your  
clay

To rot upon the marshes ; but no churl—

I take you for a soldier, Alfred's man.

ALFRED (*smiling*). I am a soldier, as you  
have divined,

But—Alfred's man ?—That were a question  
fit

For school and scholars.

CEDRIC (*handing ALFRED a sword*). Cease  
your impudence !

It passes bearing. Take this heathen sword—

I captured it from an expiring Dane—

Defend yourself and fight ! I call all these

In testimony that I fight with you

To prove the King hides not from cowardice.

ALFRED (*aside, examining the sword*). Get  
thee behind me, Satan ; tempt me not

To lively pastime in this grave event !  
What mischievous delight, what stirring cheer,  
With this stout-hearted fellow to cross  
swords !

But unto what avail? I cannot spare  
A single drop of his red blood—not one.  
(*Aloud.*) I may not fight, sir, for I hold  
my life,

Yea, even my well-being, in high trust.

CEDRIC (*rushing on* ALFRED). I care not,  
coward, for your trust ! Come on !

ALFRED (*lifting his cap and speaking in his natural voice*). Cedric !

CEDRIC (*with much emotion, kneeling*). My  
liege !

**ALL (*kneeling*). The King—the King—Thank God !**

**ALFRED.** Rise, Cedric—rise, my men. You read aright

**Your master's mind and, by the grace of God,**

He hath read yours, and knows this doughty  
band.

After the vigil of the long black night  
'Tis daybreak to my heart to see, again,  
Your loyal faces. I had mood to test  
The mettle of my soldiers. It is done ;  
I see enough in you, my gentlemen ;  
With such a handful we could hold the bridge  
Of hope that spans the chasm of despair.  
A valiant remnant hath more potency  
Than many an host less valiant.  
Imprisoned England calls us to unloose  
The pagan bonds that bind her ; let us go  
Empanoplied in faith to set her free.  
Cedric—a purpose rises and unrolls.  
Come, my brave soldiers ; Athelney is near ;  
There we will gather those who seek for us  
And plan, ere spring, a new and swift surprise  
For Guthrum and the Danes, the while they  
till

26      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Our English soil and stalk among our oaks.  
When an invading army in a land  
Of bounty swells with victory secure  
Then is the time to strike another blow,  
Despoiling them while they are at their spoils.  
Not as before will we give battle next.  
Wisdom persuades me honest strategy  
May oft be truest bravery in war.  
When Regulus the Roman—mightiest man  
Of all the Romans—in Bragada slew  
The Serpent, he at first essayed to shoot  
Straightforward arrows at the giant Worm,  
But from the gloss-smooth scales they slipped  
away  
As water trickles from a shining leaf.  
Then he commanded the balista turned  
To hurl the stones obliquely at the Thing  
Sidewise to strike between the lapping scales ;  
Forthwith the creeping creature was o'er-  
come.



So will we by some stratagem observe  
The vulnerable portion of our foe  
Between the scales that archers failed to find.  
Ay, Cedric, I conceive a new campaign.  
We will obliquely strike—and slay the Worm !

## SCENE III

*Four months later; the month of May. The Hall of the rude house at Athelney, where KING ALFRED and his faithful followers have been in hiding from the Danes during the winter.*

*A long Hall with a door at the left and one at the right; it is barely furnished with rude seats and low benches covered with furskins. NUMANERA, handmaiden to the QUEEN, and other maidens, are sitting around a frame, embroidering, and singing as they work. Through the windows may be seen the lingering glow of sunset and the birds flying to their nests; the song of the*

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*birds may be heard above the song of the  
MAIDENS, and afterwards, from time to time,  
until the light fades.*

THE MAIDENS (*singing*).

Weave, weave, weave the thread ;  
Weave the strands of ruby-red,  
Gold and silver, dark and light,  
Azure-blue and fleecy white ;  
Yellow strands to match the sun ;  
Rose of rose—the day's begun,  
Grey of grey—the day is done ;  
It is a goodly sight to see  
Maidens weaving broidery.

Weave, weave, weave the thread.  
Are our lovers lying dead  
'Mid the battle's clash and din ?  
Thus we weave the question in.  
Happy smiles for sunny bowers,  
Heart-beats for remembered hours,

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 29

Terror black that grimly lowers,  
Tears and fears for what may be,  
Weave we in the broidery.

NUMANERA. O neither smiles nor questions,  
nor hot tears,  
In these dull days ; the thread is endless grey.  
How long must we be prisoned on this Isle ?  
Rather I would by Danes be done to death !

FIRST MAID. Your courage is no courage ;  
well you know  
That every Dane would rescue you from  
death.  
My lack of beauty finds a refuge here.

SECOND MAID. To quick impatience beauty  
kindles fire.

THIRD MAID. Not with the Queen—her  
beauty asks no more  
Than to shine fair upon this lonely Isle  
Like Altar-candle in a sombre church.

30 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

NUMANERA. She hath her husband—she is  
well content ;

What chance have we of husbands ?

SECOND MAID. Cedric is here—

NUMANERA. Bah ! Cedric is the shadow of  
the King ;

I want a king—

SECOND MAID. Ha ! Hear the girl !—  
She says

I want a king as she might say I want  
A ribbon.

NUMANERA. Think you I meant a thronèd  
king ?

A king in spirit will suffice for me.

SECOND MAID (*looking archly at NUMANERA*).  
When comes Sir Helmwulf hither ?

NUMANERA (*tossing her head*). Ask yonder  
stupid birds that make the air

All-hideous with harsh discordant notes ;

I would that I could wring their little necks—

They fret my nerves like broken strings !

SECOND MAID (*aside*). Spite-cat !

He comes not—that is why.

NUMANERA. I hate the men

Upon this hateful Island ! Four long months

We are imprisoned since the King returned.

When is the trysting-day ?

SECOND MAID. When the moon changes.

NUMANERA. O—too long to wait !

Give me fierce war, great battles and events—

THIRD MAID. O—too soon !—too soon !—

NUMANERA. Ha ! Ha ! Your white cheek  
tells a tale ! And see—

The red confirms it—Hark ! The Queen !

FIRST MAID. Our Lady Beautiful !

NUMANERA(*aside, impatiently*). And I must bow  
My Roman pride to her—Must sing the song  
Of beauty—beauty, to her willing ear !

Are snow-white flesh and golden tresses fair ?

In Rome, the beauty lies in darker tints—

QUEEN ELSWITHA *enters.* The MAIDENS *rise.*

*The QUEEN smiles graciously.*

ELSWITHA. The sunset light hath faded  
from the sky,  
The orbèd moon rides in her silver car  
And heralds evening. Put the broidery-  
frame,  
The many-coloured silks, away, my girls.  
The wood breathes now deep quiet, and the  
wind  
All blossom-fragrant wooes the whispering  
trees.  
Go, sit beneath the moon and dream of love.

*[The MAIDENS put away the frame,  
and go out by the door at the left.]*

ELSWITHA. The spring-time wanes ; the  
summer comes apace ;  
The dreaded hour when from my lord I  
part

Looms like Fate's portal ever to my sight.

O God! Why didst Thou give a woman's  
heart

Free wings of flight, and yet tie fast her feet?

Swift will my spirit fly with my dear lord,

When he goes forth; but here, at Athelney,

I, being woman, must abide content.

My Alfred gone—these woods are desolate,

This Island is a dreary Isle of death;—

But I will close mine eyes, and look not down

The waiting morrows;—I will drink the joy,

Without foreboding, of the days that are.

*[From without comes the sound of an  
harp. ELSWITHA starts, clasps  
her hands, listening intently.]*

ALFRED (*singing*).

Lean from thy window, my darling delight,

And rival the moon with thy face;

I watch for thee here, in the love-laden night,

I wait for a word of thy grace.

C

34 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ELSWITHA. Our bridal song !

ALFRED (*singing*).

Lean from thy window, my darling desire,  
The Love-god keeps watch, here, with  
me,  
The fair-shining god, with his wings of white  
fire,  
O come—we are calling to thee !

[ELSWITHA *opens the door to the left.*

*The moonlight floods the room.*

ALFRED and ELSWITHA *meet*  
*on the threshold.*

ALFRED (*embracing her*). Elswitha, didst  
thou know the song ?

ELSWITHA. I knew

It as I know the beat of mine own heart.  
O happy days of wooing, when you sang  
Beneath my Mercian window !



ALFRED. Happier days  
When I have won thee, and still sing to thee.

[ELSWITHA *takes the harp and hangs  
it upon the wall; she leads  
ALFRED to a low, fur-covered  
seat; he sits and she kneels be-  
side him, leaning against him.*

ALFRED. 'Tis May-time, Love—four months  
have passed away  
Since that dark night when I to thee returned.  
I thought to come a conqueror, to lead  
My lady forth in majesty of state  
To reign o'er England; but, instead, I came  
A fugitive, in dire defeat, to make  
More fast the fastness of this Athelney,  
To hide her beauty deeper in the wood,  
And doom her to this melancholy marsh.

ELSWITHA. O like a hero thou didst come,  
my king,  
Undaunted by adversity, untouched.

36      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

By dire defeat. Fairer than laurel-leaves  
The aureole that circled your proud head,  
Brighter than victory the steadfast hope  
That shone a beacon in that midnight dark.

ALFRED. Elswitha, thou art consort for a  
king ;

Thou dost not judge by outward shows nor  
set

The music of thyself to circumstance.  
Belovèd—when I sang our bridal song  
At moonrise, in sweet memory, to-night,  
Upon my harp-strings trembled a farewell.

ELSWITHA. Ah !—Nay. Not yet farewell  
—not yet farewell !

ALFRED. The hour has come, Elswitha, I  
must go.

ELSWITHA (*turning pale, starting to her feet*).

Go ? There are many days to pass before  
The appointed tryst—I count them, one by  
one,

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 37

As miser counts his gold—one sunrise more,  
Another moonrise, yet another dawn—

ALFRED. To-night, Elswitha, I leave Athel-  
ney.

ELSWITHA (*with a forced quiet*). The tryst  
hath then been hastened ?

[ALFRED *takes* ELSWITHA'S *hand and*  
*draws her down upon the seat by*  
*his side.*

ALFRED. Elswitha, dearest partner of my  
thought,  
Thou hast approved our enterprise to strike  
The Danes in their security. If we  
But knew their secrets and their crafty plans  
The victory were ours ! They think the King  
Is conquered or, perchance, that he is dead.  
What if a minstrel strolls within their camp  
And sings them to forgetfulness of war,  
Counting, meanwhile, their numbers, hearing  
words

38      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Of marches planned, and secret purposes !

ELSWITHA. A Saxon minstrel in a Danish  
camp ?—

And who—my lord ?

ALFRED. The Saxon Alfred.

ELSWITHA (*in a voice of terror*). Oh !—

ALFRED. Fear not, Elswitha, Alfred hath  
no fear.

ELSWITHA. The peerless King knows not  
the word of fear ;

It is a stranger to his dauntless soul.

ALFRED. And thou, Elswitha, art King  
Alfred's wife.

ELSWITHA. Each bow-string hath its limit  
—this is more

Than woman's heart can bear. Alfred!—to stand  
Unarmed — alone — amongst the savage  
Danes !—

'Tis madness !

Must this life incomparable,

England's one hope, be put in jeopardy  
 Of certain death, irrevocable doom ?  
 As well might you essay the lion's cave  
 And sing to charm the hungry beasts of prey.

[ALFRED *embraces* ELSWITHA *but*  
*does not answer.*

ELSWITHA. Are my words naught to thee ?

ALFRED. More than the words  
 Of any human speech, if I might hear,  
 But I my purpose may not alter now.  
 Hope leads the host again ; each valiant arm,  
 That dropped despondent, is new-mailed with  
 strength.

We sat in council and it was agreed  
 It were in vain vainly to meet the foe ;  
 Bold fighting in the valley, on the hills,  
 Swords, and the speed of arrows, are as  
 naught

With ignorance behind them ; if we knew  
 The strength, the purpose and the quality,

40      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

The veritable number of our foe,  
Then would each English sword smite to an  
end,

Each arrow speed unto accomplishment.

ELSWITHA. Send some brave Saxon soldier  
who can sing.

ALFRED. I send no man where I have fear  
to go.

ELSWITHA. Go not alone, my lord—go not  
alone—

ALFRED. I do not go alone—I have my  
harp ;

I will be Orpheus and allure the Danes  
To let me pass. If I but sing of thee,  
My beautiful Elswitha, I am safe.

ELSWITHA (*in a low voice, leaning her head  
lightly upon his arm*). Alfred, my husband,  
I am sore afraid.

ALFRED. Be not afraid—no minstrel ever  
sang

Who seemed more minstrel than thy lord will  
seem ;

My garments are a minstrel's—and my face.  
Had I no motive for the deed, 'twould be  
A blithe adventure, fraught with merriment.  
I will, with lusty voice, sing Saxon songs ;  
I will, with lusty arm, play Saxon games ;  
And I will throw a Saxon lance to win  
A prize for thee, my lady. As I play  
I will record their weakness and their strength  
Upon the tablets of my memory—  
Their numbers, purposes, and planned cam-  
paign.

ELSWITHA (*putting her arms around ALFRED*).

I would mine arms were prison-bands  
to hold  
My lord at Athelney !

ALFRED.                      If he might stay

'Twould need no prison-bands to keep him  
here.

42 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

I could forget my quest in thy warm hair,  
Lost in its radiant meshes ; I could drink  
Forgetfulness of kingship in thine eyes  
Where living love communes with memory,  
Bask in thysmile whilst England called to me,—  
But, if I did not go, should I be then  
The man thy heart desires ?—A woman loves  
The man who does the deed.

ELSWITHA. Wise Alfred, learned in musty  
parchment rolls,  
Thou thinkest, when thy wisdom can suffice  
To master many deep philosophies,  
That it is naught to know a woman's heart ;  
Believe me, sir, it is a harder task.

ALFRED (*taking ELSWITHA'S face between his  
hands*). Look in mine eyes, Elswitha—  
do I know ?

ELSWITHA. Ah—my Love——

[ELSWITHA *leans upon ALFRED'S arm  
and looks up into his face.*



Alfred, rememberest thou the garden-bower  
New-made to mark our bridal-night ?

ALFRED. The bride  
Within the bower I do remember well ;  
She was as fair as the rose-tinted dawn  
Which led to fairer beauty of the day.

ELSWITHA. It was a bower of glowing  
roses red—

ALFRED. It held a rose more glowing than  
the bower—

ELSWITHA. O days of joyance, circled by  
your grace !

There, oftentimes my learned lord would  
seek,

From liquid tongues of countries o'er the sea,  
Some story to beguile me, turning it

With readiness to our familiar tongue  
To meet my unschooled ignorance. One tale

There was of valiant Hector and his wife—  
It made me weep,—is it not passing strange ?

44      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

A Greek, so long ago, could say the word  
My English heart would say to you to-day.

ALFRED. Words from the heart speak ever  
to the heart ;  
Love knows no yesterdays.

ELSWITHA. Alfred, thou art to me as  
Hector was ;  
Thou art my husband and my father, too,  
My mother and my nurse ; but thou art  
more—  
More e'en than Hector to Andromache—  
Thou art my King and my High Priest of  
God.

And now thou goest from me to confront  
Unequalled danger—to meet direful death ;  
Out of the deep my soul cries No to thee.

ALFRED. Too long, Elswitha, have I known  
thy soul  
To hear the No that echoes from thy lips.  
My Pleiad, who hath wandered from the sky

To light my path with thy celestial smile,  
 To bind my life with sweetest influence,  
 I love thee.

Think on that, when I am gone ;  
 Thou art the dear Beginning and the End,  
 The very warp and woof of my desire.  
 Be of good cheer—I go but to return ;  
 Then will I comfort thee as father might,  
 Solace with soothing as a kindly nurse,  
 And as an husband kiss thee. Fare thee well.

[ALFRED *embraces* ELSWITHA *and goes out by the door at the right, leaving it open.* ELSWITHA *sways for a moment, then, recovering herself, goes to the door ; she stands on the threshold and looks down the path leading to the soldiers' quarters.*

ELSWITHA. The moonlight glimmers on  
 him as he goes ;  
 With hero's tread he walks the silvered way,

46      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

A man in majesty, a king in might—  
And I am his Elswitha.    His son's milk  
Shall not be curdled by my foolish tears,  
Nor by forebodings dried within my breast.

SCENE IV

*Three weeks later ; Mid-May.    A large Hall  
in a house near Egbert-Stane.*

*A wild storm rages without.    Within the lofty  
Hall, an EALDORMAN, master of the house,  
and many disaffected SAXONS, sit around a  
table, having just finished their evening meal.*

*KING ALFRED, disguised as a minstrel,  
sits by the fire that burns in the centre of the  
Hall—on the side farthest from the table ;  
the EALDORMAN and the SAXONS continue  
their talk without noticing him, as the fire  
lies between ; apparently he is absorbed in  
drying his garments that bear evidence of the  
storm through which he has come ; he had*

*entered the Hall a short time before, and asked permission to warm himself. The EALDORMAN and the SAXONS seem to have forgotten him.*

THE EALD. What say you, Saxons, shall we tryst or no ?

The secret emissaries of the King  
Have brought the word of trysting-time and place ;

The Saxon host is rallying. As for me—  
I balance go with go not, in my hand,  
And fight with fight not !

FIRST SAX. Far-reaching issues for King  
Alfred wait

On your decision—many follow you.

SECOND SAX. (*scornfully*). What bodes  
another battle but defeat ?

No tryst for me ! A desolate dry place  
This England ! What is left ? It is a land  
O'errun with pagans—ruined, devastate.

48      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

THE EALD. Our young King is a slender  
reed that breaks  
Beneath his burden ; all his treasury  
Is emptied and his thews unstrung. God's  
Blood !

I care not for his standard in these days.

SECOND SAX. (*indignantly*). Why should we  
longer fight against our fate ?  
'Twere better to cease struggle and to swim  
In comfortable current with the tide ;  
The men of Gloucester traffic with the Danes,  
Bow to their Odin, and—they eat their corn.

THIRD SAX. I care not for my corn. I'd  
see my fields  
A harried wilderness, if I could keep  
The warmth within my heart, that once I  
knew  
For our young Alfred on that glorious day  
When he, an Atheling, on Ashdown Field,  
Asked not consent of Ethelred his lord

But led our army on to victory.

Where now is he ?

THE EALD. He is snuffed out like a candle  
in the dark.

'Tis true, he sets a tryst and bids prepare  
For a new battle, with his word of hope,  
But, were he valiant, it had been before.  
My ready armour hath been burnished bright  
Since Chippenham.

THIRD SAX. Give me a hero and a famine-  
plague  
Rather than fat fields with an idle King ;  
I am for treaty with the Danes—

ALL THE SAX. And I—

THE EALD. (*turning and seeing ALFRED whom  
he had forgotten*). Hie, minstrel !—Tune  
your harp and sing a lay  
Of heroes bold and dauntless deeds of war ;  
The Lord hath sent you for this dreary hour.  
The beating of the rain upon the house,

D

50      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

The sighing and the sobbing of the wind,  
Drive me to madness — my hair-roots are  
cold.

ALFRED. My harp is silent—and my harp-  
strings mute.

THE EALD. Come to the board and warm  
your throat with wine.

The boisterous wind that broke your harp,  
perchance,

Hath chilled you.

ALFRED. In thanks to you, I drink no  
wine to-night.

THE EALD. No wine—no song? A merry  
minstrel this !

No gleeman could be livelier ! I'd thought  
To cheer our tide with tales adventurous.

I hate the bellowing tempest—hear it how !

ALFRED. Far have I journeyed through the  
rain-soaked wood,  
Swept by the tempest on the open wold.



I cannot sing, but I will word a tale—  
If it will pleasure you.

THE EALD. 'Twill pleasure us,  
And pass the moments, making us forget  
The wind that wails like dāmnèd souls in Hell.

ALL. The tale—the tale—the tale !

[KING ALFRED *moves his seat, thus  
bringing himself more into view  
of the others ; he remains seated  
and begins his tale in an assumed  
voice, quietly, almost monotonously,  
but as he continues his voice and  
manner gather intensity.*

ALFRED. In a far land that lay beneath  
the moon,  
Midway between the mountain and the  
marsh—

Between the vision-summit and the slough  
That darkly runs athwart this middle-earth,  
In the dim morning of the dawn of days,  
There lived a King who loved his people well ;

52      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

For them he held a purpose and a prayer.  
His was a land of fair fertility,  
Of circling waters and of sunny skies ;  
In the deep secret places of the hills  
Riches were waiting those who sought for  
    them ;  
And in the valleys ran the limpid streams  
To water and to fructify the soil.  
The King said to his mind :—

    “ This realm shall rise  
High above nations, by the grace of God ;  
She shall be Wisdom's spouse, light-crowned  
    and free.”

*Now, no man, as thou knowest, can get play  
For his emprise unless he hath fit Tools ;  
A King's material and instruments  
Of governance are a well-peopled land ;  
He must have men of prayer, and men of war,  
And men of work.\** The King whose deeds I tell

\* King Alfred's own words. See Appendix.

Brave Tools possessed. Thus was he glad  
of heart.

But lo ! A horde of base barbarians  
Came forth from caverns of the nameless  
North ;

They overswept the country of the King,  
Destroyed her Altar-fires and ravished her ;  
To North and South the invaders pushed  
their way ;

To East and West they planted pagan shrines.  
The King reached forth to find his God-given  
Tools—

Some were beside him, ready to his hand ;  
Some, he found broken ; some had slipped  
away ;

And some, like children frightened by a ghost,  
Ran to the hands of the barbarians.

ALL. Traitors ! O cursèd Tools !

ALFRED. Nay, curse them not ;  
Hear out the tale. The King was sore beset ;

54      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Could he, with host depleted, overcome  
The savage horde that overspread the land ?  
That was the haunting question of the King.

FIRST SAX. What did he, minstrel ?

SECOND SAX.      What did this poor King ?

ALFRED. He went to seek the knowledge  
of his fate.

He clothed himself with garments of disguise,  
And sought the camp of the barbarians ;  
He entered in and stood before their King,  
The cruel King, whose vow was echoing  
To hew him into pieces, when they met.

SECOND SAX. He went alone ?

THIRD SAX.      Alone ?—A hero's deed !

ALFRED. About the camp he wound a  
gracious way,  
As any minstrel might who thought to please—  
As I came here, but now, and entered in  
From out the storm and sat beside your fire  
To find a generous hospitality—

They looked not on him as an enemy ;  
Wide as sweet music is the minstrel's home.  
Savage in all things, the barbarians,  
Moved by soft strains, were tame and gentle-  
wise,

As Cerberus, the hideous Hound of Hell,  
And the grim warder of that dreadful gate  
Were moved by strains of Orpheus, when he  
played

Upon his harp melodious. The King,  
Of whom I tell, possessed an harp sweet-  
strung,

Low-vibrant with deep woodland memories ;  
His song-hoard had been gained from many  
folk,

His voice was never wearied—

THE EALD. (*interrupting*). Would that yours  
Were like it, minstrel, you could sing the tale.

FIRST SAX. We need no music for heroic  
deeds.

56      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED. Alone—the King as minstrel faced  
his foes ;

Alone—he stood before his enemy ;  
Blithely he roamed about the idle camp,  
Assuming welcome and receiving it ;  
He saw the savage army, heard their oaths—  
Flung forth like javelins—to their false gods,  
To grind the King and all his subjects fine  
As dust before a land-storm. Loud they  
swore

To bend the stubborn neck of every man  
Left in the kingdom, when the broadsword's  
work

Was finished there. Then laughed the  
Minstrel-King—

It seemed that he was laughing at his song,  
And they laughed with him at the jocund  
words—

He laughed, forsooth, to hear the vaunting  
boast

Of the bold King, knowing its vanity,  
Laughed lightly in the face of that fierce  
King.

THIRD SAX. Brave hero ! I would follow  
such a man  
Into the everlasting pit.

SECOND SAX. And I.

ALFRED. He felt keen gladness throbbing  
through his frame.

To be encircled by the chance of death,  
Death terrible with torture, yet to hold  
Within his daring hand the mastery  
Of the adventure, was a conquest fine  
To whet his temper and to stir his pride.  
Gained was the knowledge of his enemy,  
Their number and their weakness and their  
strength,  
A solid step-stone unto victory.

ALL. Hail to the King ! Hail to the hero  
bold !

58      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED. He left the camp of the barbarians—

He knew their secrets and it was enough.

Then through the night and through the day  
he sped

Back to his camp. Lo ! On the second  
night,

A tempest broke upon him on the wold ;  
The pent-up water-spouts of heaven burst  
forth

And poured on him their deluge ; he was fain  
To shelter him at some warm welcoming  
hearth ;

He found a friend's door, and he entered in ;  
They knew him not—he sat down in their  
midst—

And then he heard these words from his own  
Toll :

“ Our young King is a slender reed that breaks  
Beneath his burden—all his treasury



Is emptied, and his thews unstrung—God's  
Blood !

I care not for his standard in these days."

[ALFRED rises.

Whilst he before the enemy had stood,  
Gay laughter moved him ! When he heard  
these words

Then he knew sorrow—then his harp-string  
broke !

*[As ALFRED has been speaking, excitement has been gaining among the SAXONS ; it reaches its height as he finishes ; they fall on their knees and bow their heads, overcome by remorse.*

THE EALD. (*offering his sword*). Sir King  
— forgive — forgive me ! Take my  
sword !—

THIRD SAX. By God ! Here is my hero !  
I am his

For life—for death—for ever !

60 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALL. O forgive—

FIRST SAX. Most noble gracious King—  
forgive !—

ALFRED (*taking off his disguise*). Rise—my  
brave Tools—forgiven.

Ye knew me not—

And now ye know me ! The appointed  
tryst

Is Egbert-Stane. The Saxons gather fast ;

We hasten on our way to keep the tryst ;

We wait our followers—will you be there ?

ALL (*rising, drawing their swords and lifting  
them high*). Every man—my lord !

SCENE V

*Two weeks after the Battle of Ethandun*

*The Forest of Selwood. The Scene is the same as  
in Scene I. The forest is now green with  
the full foliage of late May. Afternoon.*

*Enter a group of SAXON SOLDIERS, singing.*

THE SOLDIERS (*singing*).

We met the Danes upon the downs,  
With battle-axe and brand ;  
We drove the Danes across the downs,  
We drove them from the land.  
O the salt seas !  
O the oak trees !  
O the mighty men of England !

We drove the Danes across the downs,  
We drove them to the sea ;  
The Golden Dragon holds the downs  
With golden victory.  
O the salt seas !  
O the oak trees !  
O the mighty men of England !

FIRST SOL. Now comes a better ending to  
that song

62      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Than when we sung it hitherto ; then Danes  
Were driven to their far eyrie, but returned  
With the returning tide, at change of moon.  
Our Alfred, England's darling, has achieved  
A goodlier victory ; he has kept them here—  
His vanquished enemies—within his realm.

SECOND SOL. None but a God-descended  
conqueror

Could turn the blood-steeped Danes to  
Englishmen,  
Could make the mighty Guthrum change his  
name,  
Forswear his heathen gods, and bend his  
neck

To Saxon sovereignty.

THIRD SOL.                      By the Lord God !

That is a victory ! The Sea-World's King  
Our darling's godson ! Wine and mead and  
ale.

Are running in my veins.

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 63

SECOND SOL.                      A master stroke  
For England—She is saved! Hark you—I  
hear  
The coming of the King! Let us dispatch  
His business.

(*Calling.*)                      Gurth!

ALL (*calling*).                      Gurth!—Gurth!

[*From the centre, where the forest is  
more open, comes GURTH the  
neat-herd; he is a rough, awk-  
ward man in peasant dress; he  
has a shock of red hair, a loud  
voice, and a self-satisfied manner.*

FIRST SOL. Make haste, man! You are  
crawling like a snail.  
Know you a neat-herd hereabouts named  
Gurth?

GURTH (*gruffly*). And if I did, what matters  
that to you?

SECOND SOL. Find him. The mighty  
Alfred, England's King,

64      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Would speak with him. Don't swallow me,  
my man,

'Tis simple statement ; there's no need to  
drop

Your gaping jaw down to your belly—Come !  
The King awaits you.

GURTH (*trembling*). Sir—the King—the  
King !

What have I done ? Good Lord ! What  
have I done ?

KING ALFRED *enters with Thanes and soldiers.*

GURTH *falls on his knees.*

GURTH (*stuttering with confusion*). Almighty  
King—All-glorious one !—

ALFRED.

Silence !

I am not God ; use not His attributes  
In your address to any mortal man.

GURTH. O Sir—O King ! I did not do  
it !

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 65

ALFRED. You have a daughter, Gurth,  
Elfreda named.

(*Aside.*) From dankest bogs the loveliest lilies  
grow.

GURTH. A daughter?—Ay, Elfreda. O  
great King—

It is a plot—she did not do it——

ALFRED. A quick denial breeds suspicion,  
Gurth ;

I am the witness of Elfreda's deed.

GURTH. Holy St. Peter ! She has ruined  
me !

I always told her mother——

ALFRED. Cease, man !—Naught but the  
good, Elfreda gives——

The life of Alfred, England's king, she saved ;  
I would, remembering, reward the deed.

GURTH. Ye devils ! But the Mass-Priest  
spoke the truth——

He said a jug too much befogs a man——

E

I'm drunk and dreaming. There's Elfreda,  
now—

It will unfog me when I see her face.

[As GURTH is speaking, ELFREDA is heard singing.

ELFREDA.      Violet so blue,  
                    O to be you  
Down in the cool green grass !

ELFREDA *enters from the right; over her arm is a garland of flowers that she has woven, and her hands are filled with other flowers; when she sees the KING, the song dies on her lips, and the garland and flowers fall to the ground.*

**ELFREDA.** My minstrel—and my King!

**ALFRED.**    **Elfreda—we**  
Have come to-day to thank you in the name  
Of England.

[*Taking her hand.*  
When it broke the bread, this hand



Knew not it was for England. What slight  
things

Become momentous in man's destiny !

[*Turning to GURTH, who has been  
overcome with astonishment at  
ELFREDA'S recognition of the  
KING.*

Attend us, Gurth, we have a word to say.

(*Aside.*) I would I were as potent with the  
Danes

To strike them powerless without e'en a blow.

(*Aloud.*) I cannot loiter here with lifeless  
men—

GURTH. O mighty King ! I am befogged !—

[*ALFRED, smiling, pricks GURTH with  
his sword.*

GURTH (*aside*). Swlf ! That unfogs me !

(*Aloud.*) Great King ! Is this a jest for  
laughter played

On a poor neat-herd ?

68      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED.

No—a truth !

Lost in the forest I had wandered far,  
Forgetting food ;—stern Nature cried aloud  
Too jealous of mortality, I sank  
Beside the way with weariness. Your child  
Then found me, fed me from her share,  
revived

My ebbing strength, and knew not what she  
did,

Nor unto whom she did it. In this hour  
Of England's triumph, I would recompense  
The deed. Wherefore, to you I give an  
house

In Cornwall and two hides of land ; you now  
Become a freeman, by the Saxon law.

Also, a dower for maintenance I give.

My messengers will come with further word.

[GURTH *makes violent contortions in  
an effort to speak, but, finding  
it impossible, bows his head.*

ELFREDA. For mother !—O my King ! No  
more the cold,  
The cruel winter cold, will nip those arms  
That held me when I was a little child !

[ELFREDA *stoops to gather the flowers  
she had dropped ; selecting one,  
she offers it to the KING.*

Here is a fairy flower for thanks, my King,  
From the enchanted circle in the wood.

GURTH (*aside, making desperate efforts to stop  
ELFREDA*). She has no fear of man or  
God or king !

(*Aloud.*) Hold your rude tongue, you brazen  
child, speak not  
To kings in every-day !

ALFRED (*accepting the flower and placing it  
in his armour*). Symbol of life—the flower  
upon the steel !

[*Through the wood, at the left, is heard  
the coming of many feet.* ALFRED

70 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

*turns his head ; his face lights  
with pleasure.*

My royal lady !—

[*Leaving* GURTH *and* ELFREDA,  
ALFRED *walks to the left as*  
ELSWITHA *and her* MAIDENS *enter.*

ELSWITHA. An hundred thousand welcomes

—O my liege !

ALFRED. O shining Flower of England !

Sun-begot,

New-bathed with dew of morning, thou, in-  
deed,

Art rich reward for hardships well-endured ;

Now battles, dangers, weariness and war,

Are all forgot in thee.

ELSWITHA.

And I in thee

Forgot the days of thistle and of thorn

At Athelney—so many days, my lord—

The days were cycles and the hours were  
years.

*[As they speak, ELFREDA and GURTH are standing at the left in silence, not knowing whether to go or to stay. Suddenly ELSWITHA becomes conscious of them : she looks quickly at ELFREDA, and about the wood in a questioning way, but so veiled that ALFRED does not notice it.]*

ELSWITHA (*aside*). My feet kept pace with  
my impatient heart

To meet my Love ; he loitered as he came.

(*Aloud.*) You paused, my lord, upon your  
way to us—

ALFRED. Yea, for a work of justice to that  
child ;

She saved your Alfred's life.

ELSWITHA (*apparently seeing ELFREDA for the first time*). A happy child !

In sooth, she seems o'er-frail for such a  
deed.

ALFRED. God chooses weak things to confound the strong ;

I will recount the circumstance to thee.

ELSWITHA (*with sudden intuition*). 'Tis not your wont to wear a flower, my lord—

ALFRED (*smiling*). This is a fairy flower.

[ELSWITHA *looks at ELFREDA and sees that the flowers in her hand are like the one which ALFRED wears ; she draws herself up with a proud movement of reserve.*

ELSWITHA (*coldly*). I did not know  
That thou hadst found, once more, the tales  
we leave

In babbling babyhood.

ALFRED (*unconscious of her tone and mood*).

We touch the spring  
Of our immortal life when we become  
A little child, again.

[ALFRED and ELSWITHA walk into the wood, followed by the MAIDENS, THANES, and SOLDIERS, who have been talking together in low tones. As they pass on, NUMANERA speaks to a MAIDEN.

NUMANERA (*whispering*). Houses are cheap in England—cheap as bread.

THE MAIDEN. Our noble King is gracious.

NUMANERA (*suspiciously*). Gracious ?—Ha !

[GURTH and ELFREDA have not moved.

GURTH stands with open mouth as though dazed ; ELFREDA picks up the garland and dances, twining it around her, and dancing in and out of it as she sings.

ELFREDA. Violet so blue,  
O to be you !

Down in the cool green grass.

Violet so blue,  
O to be you !

Watching the clouds as they pass.

74      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

GURTH. Elfreda, am I mad ?

ELFREDA (*kissing him*). Now, are you ?

Nay !

My prayers are answered, that is all. I  
prayed

To God, and asked the fairies, whom He  
loves,

To send a healthier home than that poor hut  
For mother—

GURTH. It is wonderful !

ELFREDA.

O—nay !

Naught is more wonderful than everything.



## ACT II

### SCENE I

*Autumn of the following year—Cornwall—  
The Sea-shore*

KING ALFRED *stands on the shore, looking  
out to sea*

ALFRED. O deep sea-waters, surging ever-  
more •

In the wide way appointed unto you  
By the great Warden of the Universe !  
Mysterious, unfathomable, you fling  
Perpetual challenge to the mind of man.  
Here, on this foam-flecked shore, I stand and  
gaze  
Upon the far horizon, where the blue  
Of sky-dome dips to touch the gleaming grey.

76      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

What if beyond this sea-realm there is land ?  
I will build ships to push the question  
through

These tossing and tumultuous waves. I will  
Send forth my sailors on the untracked way  
To bring an answer from that billowy world.  
Othere has told the story of the North ;  
His words are as a meteor to my mind ;  
They stir me to adventure, like to his.  
Had I been born to lesser dignity,  
Had I no kingly claims to hold me here,  
I would go forth upon that moving world,  
And tilt a tourney with the great spearman  
To wrest his secrets from him, which he  
keeps

Behind his vast and foamy fortress hid.  
Last night, as I lay sleepless on my bed,  
I heard a voice say : "Look, what is to be !"  
Then, like the sheet our blessèd Lord let  
down

To Peter, lo ! I saw a vision there.  
On some high pinnacle I seemed to stand ;  
Beneath my eyes a greater England spread ;  
To the far East she stretched—where, radiant,  
The splendid morning rises ; to the West—  
Where the great sun in majesty goes down.  
I saw a mighty race born of this land,  
Speaking one language, worshipping one God,  
Drawing as common sap their nourishment  
From one great mother-vine ; new branches  
    grown—  
For separate climbing—but bound, each to  
    each,  
In strength of heritage and unity.  
Great ships I saw, like shuttles back and forth  
Weaving and interweaving a firm web  
In friendly commerce for a common gain ;  
New order ruled and just and righteous  
    laws ;  
And all the sons and daughters of this race

78      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Were clothed upon with Christ-beholding  
faith

As with white-shining garment. This I saw—  
Was it a dream—or was it prophecy ?

Caedmon had visions—he was not a Saint—

The consecrated Bede tells many a tale

Of visions granted to the sons of men ;

Perchance this was, like theirs, a Godspeech  
sent

To comfort me with promise of the goal

In my unequal fight with circumstance.

The war-tracked land—burnt, harried, de-  
vastate ;

The unschooled, ignorant people, seeing not ;

The work which calls to me from dawn  
to eve ;

Ofttimes o'erwhelm me and dismay my soul.

I am like one who strives alone to fell

A giant forest on a storm-black night.

*[In the distance CEDRIC appears.]*

Cedric!—My heart-of-oak! His sturdy ways  
Are pleasant to me.

[*The KING turns to meet CEDRIC.*

Cedric—I know your countenance, full well ;  
I can discern a pent-up flood kept back  
By courteous control. Speak! If thy King  
Can serve thee—it is done.

CEDRIC. My liege lord is a great and  
glorious king ;  
I am a churl-begot, a lowly-born,  
And this he ever maketh me forget.

ALFRED. *It is the mind of man that giveth  
rank ;*

*Man's truth is his nobility.\**

CEDRIC (*aside, with emotion*). O King  
Of mind! O King of very truth!

ALFRED. Cedric—  
You here have followed me to speak—  
speak on.

\* King Alfred's own words. See Appendix.

CEDRIC. I speak for Alfred, King of England, sir.

He placed the Golden Dragon on this Isle—  
It floats in triumph, but it stands too still !  
He is the Julius Cæsar of to-day ;  
He and the Roman Pontiff could divide  
The earth, would he but lead to conquest new  
The Golden Dragon and the Saxon host.

ALFRED. Say it not, Cedric. Your en-  
kindling words  
Strike on my ready mind like flint on steel.  
If my desire were captain of my will,  
The whole wide world would be my battle-  
field

Until it was my vassal—Tempt me not !  
I follow Christ who is the Prince of Peace.  
Let not that doubting smile lurk in your eyes,  
My Thane, who stood beside me on the field—  
I fought for Christ and for His sovereignty  
Upon this Island. What is done—is done ;

And should again the dusky raven dare  
Upon our hearthstones its dark shadow cast,  
Or hide our altars 'neath its ebon wings,  
Then will I fight again as I have fought ;  
But proud ambition's call I follow not,  
Nor yield to lust of conquest or of fame,  
For Fame is but the vaunting of this world.  
A glorious fate for England I foresee ;  
But ere she meets it, she must be remade.  
A lawless people, restless and unlearned,  
Surge through our border as the untamed  
surf

Surges perpetually upon the shore.  
Swart and woe-ridden lies our fruitful land ;  
Fierce lust of gain-getting possesses it ;  
Heathen communication hath corrupted it,  
And senseless superstition holds the glass  
To blinking eyes disordered by the past.  
Naught bindeth a man's soul down to the  
dust

F

82      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

As ignorance ; naught can so dower his soul  
With deed of manumission—as to know.

Poor England sits in moonless, starless night  
Beside a fast-closed door, unschooled, un-  
taught ;

Men cannot read the words they say to God  
Nor read the words that God hath said to  
them ;

And yet, a little way beyond the door  
Is Light—and Wisdom waiting with his torch.  
Is it not better to teach men to think,  
To feed them with the eternal Bread of Life,  
Than it can be to lay them in the dust  
Silent and stark ?

CEDRIC (*smiling*). I pray you, did you ask  
that of the Danes ?

ALFRED. I asked the Danes one question—  
“ Will you yield ? ”

And straightway made them answer “ Yea ” to  
me.



I then obeyed the voice of God on high  
 And now I would obey Him in His peace.  
 The King who pours his subjects' valour  
 forth

Or seeks afar new conquest for his pride,  
 Leaving the harrow standing in his home,  
 Is but a fool consumed by greed of gain.

CEDRIC. O not for gain I plead—but that  
 my King,  
 Who is the destined sovereign of the world,  
 May leave therein his monument—

ALFRED. I work  
 For God and England—my best monument  
 A godlier England.

Champion-wise, my Thane,  
 You met my thought in battle—meet it now;  
 High vision of a loftier warfare looms,  
 A warfare with the forces of the dark  
 Not transitory, temporal, but fraught  
 With everlasting issues.

84      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

CEDRIC (*with enthusiasm*). My King, I  
follow where you lead, beneath  
Your royal standard on the crimson field,  
Or in the quiet pastures green of peace.

ALFRED (*drawing his sword*). There spoke  
the faithful servant of his King !  
Cedric, look on this sword ! Behold the point  
Made sharp for service ! Here, upon the hilt,  
A cross is wrought—the symbol of our faith ;  
This holds an inward meaning, mystical.  
A Christian sword is consecrate to Christ  
To fight His holy battles for the Truth ;  
Those battles won, then should a Christian king  
Reverse the sword—thus, Cedric—and hold  
    .    high  
The Christ-cross for the desolate dark world,  
To lead men on in God's name to the light.

[ALFRED *reverses the sword and holds  
the cross high above his head.*

CEDRIC *falls upon his knees.*

SCENE II

*The following afternoon. Cornwall.*

*A beautiful wood. The trees are touched with yellow. A carpet of thick moss covers the ground. ELFREDA comes from the left with a buoyant dancing step; she is dressed in white.*

ELFREDA. O joyous-hearted, music-haunted  
wood !

O dew-fresh, sun-and-shadow woven wood !

O happy wood ! Thou art my heart's own  
home !

I love the heavenward-reaching trees that  
sing,

Waving their tossing boughs to lure me high ;

I love the wood-flowers peeping from the  
moss,

The lichen and the bracken and the fern

Would I were free as any wingèd bird

86      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

To wander through the forest all the day !  
The King hath dowered us with dignity ;  
I am well-mindful of his benefits ;  
But—O—I would that he had left me free  
To tryst and dance with fairies in the wood !  
Now is my father set about with thought  
Of guarding me and making me a dame,  
A very stiff and stately little dame.

*[The strains of a harp are heard,  
coming nearer.]*

Hark ! 'Tis a harp sweet-singing in the wood.  
Some happy, strolling, minstrel-harper comes.

*[She looks down the path.]*

Nay ! 'Tis a courtier, sumptuously arrayed ;  
Now will Elfreda hear how courtiers sing !

*[She seats herself under a large tree  
beside the path. From the right  
enters SIR CORNEWULF, Cup-  
bearer to the KING, playing on his  
harp and singing.]*

CORNEWULF (*singing*).

O the Spear and the Spindle

Must parted be this day !

For the Spear must speed to battle away,

A battle to wage and a battle to win,

But the Spindle must bide in the shadow

And spin—

And spin.

O sorry for the Spindle,

For she can never feel

The glory of battle, when steel strikes steel,

The rapture of the rushing, the clanging and  
the din,

For the Spindle must bide in the shadow

And spin—

And spin.

[*As CORNEWULF sings the last line, he  
has nearly reached the tree under  
which ELFREDA is seated; she  
rises and steps into the path.*]

ELFREDA. *I will not—nay—I do not like to spin.*

**CORNEWULF.** Who art thou, maiden,  
beautiful as spring ?

ELFREDA. I am Elfreda, daughter of that  
Gurth

**The King made free.**

CORNEWULF (*aside*). Her eyes are bluer  
than the blue of heaven,

Her hair is sunnier than the summer sun ;  
When she unfoldeth, she will grace the world  
And crown a man's estate.

(*Aloud.*) Fair maiden, sit  
Beneath the branches of the burnished  
beech.

**And I will make a little song for thee!**

**ELFREDA.** Art thou King Alfred's man ?

**CORNEWULF.** Unto the death !

I am the great King's Cup-bearer—my name  
Is Cornewulf.

ELFREDA (*leaning against the tree*). I will  
not sit—for sitting argues stay—  
But I will hear you, if you will not sing  
Of Spindles in the shadow.

CORNEWULF. I had not seen thee, when I  
made that song.

[CORNEWULF *sings to the accompani-  
ment of his harp, looking at  
ELFREDA as he sings.*

CORNEWULF (*singing*).

Beneath her maiden snows,  
All petal-folded deep,  
Lieth the fair primrose,  
Asleep—asleep.

Her sun I now will be,  
My quickening fire shall make  
Her virgin heart for me  
Awake—awake !

[ELFREDA *listens to the song without  
emotion.*

CORNEWULF. Thou art not yet awake,  
Elfreda.

ELFRED. Awake? I am awake; look in  
mine eyes.

CORNEWULF (*aside*). 'Twere fire to passion  
to gaze long therein.

(*Aloud.*) Maiden, thy soul still sleeps and  
waits the dawn

Of love. Wilt thou, when thy dawn-time  
hath come,

Remember Cornewulf?

ELFRED. (*looking critically at CORNEWULF*).  
Remember thee?—

Thou art not so comely as the King.

CORNEWULF. Maiden,  
No man is comely by his side.

ELFRED. (*hesitatingly*). Thy voice  
Is not so wondrous as the King's.

CORNEWULF. The King's?  
No voice is like the King's, but I will say  
Low words to thee that he will never say.



ELFREDA. Wilt thou? What are they?

CORNEWULF. Ask me not to-day;  
The hour for words will come—

ELFREDA. How shall I know, sir, that I  
am awake  
When now I know not that I am asleep?

CORNEWULF. Women sleep fast and know  
not that they sleep,  
But, when they waken, then straightway they  
know;

Soon thou wilt be a woman, lovely maid.

ELFREDA. I am a woman now, King Alfred  
says.

CORNEWULF (*aside*). He will approve my  
choice—all things beclad  
In beauty are by Alfred well approved.  
(*Aloud.*) If one should come to woo thee,  
maiden, say,  
“I pledged my troth to Cornewulf, who gave  
His heart to me, in the same hour we met.”

ELFREDA. No pledges and no promise  
 have I given,  
 But I will give not unto him who asks,  
 Remembering thee—Sir Cornewulf.

CORNEWULF. Enough !  
 True love compelleth love by Love's own law.  
 Keep thy fair field of flowers unpledged, and I  
 Will win the field and foster the fair flowers.  
 Before the time unfolds, remember this—  
 I hold within my hand authority  
 By my lord's grace ; I am thy trusty knight ;  
 If thou hast need of service, call to me—  
 To Cornewulf, Cup-bearer to the King.

[CORNEWULF *bows reverently to*  
 ELFREDA, *who courtesies ; he goes*  
*off to the left.*

ELFREDA (*looking after him*). Sir Corne-  
 wulf, Cup-bearer to the King !—  
 I'm very glad the Court to Cornwall came.

[NUMANERA *comes in sight.*

How pretty is the scarlet of that robe  
Amid the green !—A lady of the Court,  
She treads as one who walks in palaces.

[NUMANERA *enters from the right.*

NUMANERA. I saw thee, maiden, with Sir  
Cornewulf.

'Tis well to have a care with courtiers  
bold ;

Let them not lure thee to the woods alone.

ELFREDA. Why ?—Lady—

NUMANERA. Men are ofttimes dangerous.

ELFREDA. I found no danger in Sir Corne-  
wulf.

NUMANERA (*shrugging her shoulders, looking  
slyly at ELFREDA*). Perchance, you saw  
him not !—You love the King ?

ELFREDA. With all my heart. Do you  
not love the King ?

NUMANERA (*with sarcastic homage*). I honour  
him.

ELFREDA. When honour moves me, then  
Straightway I love.

NUMANERA (*regarding her searchingly*). The  
King hath dowered you?—

You saved his life?

ELFREDA. I gave him bread—no more.

NUMANERA. Tell me the story!

ELFREDA. There is naught to tell;  
Our gracious King is mighty in exchange;  
I gave him bread—he made my father  
free.

NUMANERA. And is that all?

ELFREDA. O no! He gave us land,  
A stately house, and many royal gifts.

NUMANERA (*with irony*). It is not strange  
you saw not Cornewulf.

ELFREDA. I saw him, lady—I can see  
him now.

NUMANERA. 'Tis courtly manners to con-  
ceal your thought.

There yet are many things to learn, fair maid,  
Ere you are Court-cut—will you learn of me ?

ELFREDA. I thank you, lady.

NUMANERA (*aside*). She clothes herself with  
chastity for charm ;

She wears the garments of sweet innocence ;  
Methinks the wench hath not so much to  
learn !

Her power is waxing—I must weld a link.

(*Aloud.*) Soon you will come to Court ?

ELFREDA. 'Tis as the King

Commandeth me.

NUMANERA (*smiling*). He is your master—  
then ?

ELFREDA (*remembering CORNEWULF'S  
phrase*). Unto the death—

NUMANERA. Sit here, with me, and I  
Will tell you many stories of the Court.

ELFREDA. Your pardon, lady—I must  
hasten home.

96      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

NUMANERA (*sweetly*). My little Saxon  
maiden, we are friends ?

ELFREDA (*with reserve*). Lady, I wish you  
well.

[ELFREDA *bows to NUMANERA and goes  
off to the right, walking more slowly  
than is her wont.*

NUMANERA (*looking after ELFREDA, her eyes  
narrowing unpleasantly*). Piece fits to  
piece—I see the pattern whole !

A little child—with little winning ways—

A bit of bread—and freedom for a fee—

So blew the breezes then, perchance, but now

The blossom ripens to the luscious fruit ;

Her form is rounded and her proud young  
breasts

Swell with the rising tide of womanhood.

Despite his prayers and his philosophies

This Alfred is no paragon. I heard

A secret gossip of his early youth

From one who hunted with him in these  
woods ;

Temptation of the flesh beset him, then ;

What hath been comes again—men do not  
change.

*[Starting with sudden remembrance.*

At last I understand the mystery !—

The secret of the jewel of the King !

For many days Cesario hath wrought,

With jealous pride of the artificer,

Upon a jewel ; with his teasing smile

Called me Pandora, Eve, and likesome names,

When I essayed to trip from him the tale.

Then, fearing silence more than word dis-  
creet,

He warned me breathe no mention of the  
thing—

The King would make a secret gift, he said,

No one must know, and, least of all, the  
Queen.

G

98      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Here, in the wood, led by the guiding hand  
Of my avenging Angel, do I chance  
Upon the wanton secret. O kind Fate,  
To send me in my seething mood of wrath  
This instrument of vengeance !

[NUMANERA *pulls a delicate branch  
from a bush and, ruthlessly strip-  
ping off the leaves, scatters them  
about her.*

I hate the Queen !—I hate the Saxon brood !  
But most of all I hate the arrogant Queen !  
Long have I hated her imperious pride—  
It ever stirs the ancient blood of Rome  
To hot and fierce rebellion in my veins—  
But I have bowed in feigned humility  
That I might linger where Sir Helmwulf  
passed.

Last night I stood behind the royal seat  
And saw a thing that let the devils loose  
Within me. Helmwulf's eyes I saw turn swift



Upon Elswitha—when she marked him not,  
And deep therein white worship burned. To  
feel

That look shine on me I would crawl through  
Hell.

Who is this Mercian dame that she should  
hold

The dower of all things emptied in her lap ?

The royal diadem—King Alfred's love—

The lofty heart of Helmwulf, peerless knight !

[NUMANERA *stoops, plucks some red  
berries from a low bush and crushes  
them in her hands; the red juice  
slowly trickles between her fingers  
and falls upon her gown.*

The purple from her shoulders I will strip  
And weave for her a girdle of sharp thorns—  
A sorrowing woman she shall bend her head !  
Must I alone weep through the haunted  
night ?

100      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Must I alone pluck love with bitter hands  
From out my heart ?—Ah !    Let *her* writhe  
   awhile !  
The God of Justice sends me my revenge.

SCENE III

*An hour later.    The house in Cornwall given  
   to GURTH by the KING*

*A large Hall.    To the right, a door stands partly  
   open ; in the centre wall there is a closed  
   door.    GURTH, the neat-herd, dressed as a  
   Saxon gentleman, walks up and down the  
   Hall.    DRIDDA, his wife, sits on a stiff  
   wooden seat ; her hair is grey, and her  
   kind but careworn face is weather-beaten ;  
   her hands are awkwardly folded, as though  
   unaccustomed to idleness, and she moves as  
   though unaccustomed to sitting still.*

GURTH. Ho you !    Sit up upon your chair  
   more straight,  
Old dame, and do not wallow.    You have look

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 101

Of churl's hut ; noble ladies sit up straight !

[*With a sudden jerk, DRIDDA  
straightens herself.*

And close your gaping mouth ! A lady's mouth  
Is shut from flies.

[*DRIDDA closes her mouth with a snap.*

That is more seemly, Drid.

DRIDDA. How can I tell you what I have  
to tell ?

GURTH. You silly woodcock ! Open it for  
that.

DRIDDA. Your tunic you have put on hind  
before.

. You look like any neat-herd in good clothes  
That he has borrowed for an holiday.

GURTH. Swlf ! So it is. This costly finery  
Is more difficult to match than fagots.  
You are not all a fool.

DRIDDA. No, Gurth, somewhat was over-  
left for you.

GURTH. 'Tis easy to be master of a house—

DRIDDA (*interrupting*). But not to look like  
one.

GURTH.

Elfreda fits

This fine estate as she were born thereto.

Why is it? She is ours, and we—and we—

DRIDDA. Come, say it out—we look, for  
all our boast,

Like neat-herds.

GURTH. Talk not of neat-herds! What  
are they to us?

DRIDDA (*chuckling*). I saw a neat-herd, one  
night—in a dream!

GURTH (*testily*). Talk not your folly to  
Elfreda, Drid—

Her lofty station she must learn, nor run

Like a wild round-eyed hare within the wood,

Singing as common wench upon the way.

Ladies don't sing.

DRIDDA. Poor ladies! And poor me!

Your ladies cannot sit nor sing nor speak !

'Tis very weary to be gentlefolks.

GURTH. Shame on you, Drid !

*[Drawing himself up.*

We each must fit the place

We're born to. Churls are churls, but gentlemen

Are gentlemen. How will I come to Court

If your Elfreda makes them laugh at me

By manners of the soil ?

DRIDDA.

*You go to Court ?*

*[There is a noise at the door, and singing is heard without.*

A VOICE (*singing*).

This merry, merry world is but a shell !

Crack it goes, and who can tell

If it be Heaven or if it be Hell !

Call for the Priest, and call for the Bell,

It may be Heaven, and it may be Hell.

DRIDDA. Who is the clatterer before our  
door

Dinning so loud that most unholy song ?

GURTH (*going to the door and opening it*). Why,  
here's a jolly gentleman from Court  
As I of Court am speaking. 'Tis a friend—  
A friend !—

*A little hunch-backed man, gaily dressed in  
molley-coloured garments, enters ; his eyes  
are sharp and bright ; he is laughing ;  
he is MONFICHET, the King's Fool.*

MONFICHET. The door stood open as I  
passed this way,  
I paused to say good-morrow.

(*Aside.*) I would see  
How fits the neat-herd to a stately house ;  
It is a study for philosophers.

GURTH (*with effusion*). You're very wel-  
come—very welcome, sir—  
O very welcome !

MONFICHET. Welcomes so many bode  
you wish me gone !

(*Aside.*) But yesterday I met this vulgar  
Gurth.

I'm near the King—ergo, I am a friend ;  
He knows not of my quality at Court ;  
It is enough I breathe the same fine air ;  
Better I like the baiting of the lords  
Than fawning flattery.

(*Aloud.*) Good morrow, Gurth !  
Good morrow to the Lady of the House !

DRIDDA (*aside*). I've seen such curious  
things since I was rich !

(*Aloud.*) I think, sir, that's a most unholy song.

MONFICHET. Madam, don't think. There's  
nothing so fatigues  
The brain as thought. I never think, and  
thus—

I keep my beauty, madam, as you see,  
Untouched by time.

DRIDDA (*aside, but loudly enough to be heard*). Poor gentleman! I fear He's lost his wits.

MONFICHET. Yea, madam, that I have. But Gurth hath double quantity for two.

GURTH (*drawing himself up proudly*). My wits and brains have brought me where you see.

Had I less brains, I'd be a neat-herd still.

MONFICHET (*aside*). Were he still neat-herd, he would have more brains. (*Aloud.*) Thy brain is a bright comet—with a tail.

GURTH. Men know me, Drid—You say I'm only Gurth!

MONFICHET. A man is ever more than his wife sees—  
If Gurth were only Gurth—why—he would be  
Gurth only—that is plain.



GURTH (*aside*, to DRIDDA). A learned wit !  
His words are very wise !

DRIDDA (*aside*, to GURTH). They have no  
sense !

I wonder—is he drunk, or is he mad ?

MONFICHET. Fair lady—wilt thou take me  
for thy knight ?

I'll crown thee Queen of Beauty in the list ;  
I'll wear thy colour in the tournament.

What is thy colour, lady ?

DRIDDA (*much confused*). Blue—no, red—  
(*Aside.*) Mad — mad — he is as mad as  
March—

(*Aloud.*) Green—yellow—

MONFICHET. Madam, must I wear rain-  
bows on my helm ?

DRIDDA (*aside*). Mad as a cock that's shut  
up in a pen !

(*Aloud.*) Sir, are there many like you at  
the Court ?

MONFICHET. I am the one and only of my kind.

DRIDDA. God knows it is enough, sir.

MONFICHET. Unhappy me! Now must I die of love!

DRIDDA (*aside*). Mad! He is raving mad.  
O! I am sure of it.

MONFICHET. I heard you, madam. All the world is mad;

I am not madder than the whole mad race.  
In sooth, this madman, knowing he is mad,  
Is a sane madman not so mad as most.

DRIDDA (*aside, putting her hand to her head*).  
If he stays longer, I shall go mad too.

[*Aloud, rising from her seat.*

Poor gentleman! You need a medicine.

I go to find you one—

MONFICHET. Save your steps, lady; seek no medicine;

My madness is immortal. I must go;

My lord the King awaits me—

[MONFICHET *bows with elaborate ceremony and goes out.*

DRIDDA. In God's name, Gurth, who is the gentleman?

GURTH. He is a mighty minion of the Court.

He often rides beside the King; methinks

He is a famous counsellor or reeve;

I met him yesterday upon the road,

And we became the merry friends you see.

DRIDDA (*aside*). O what a merry friendship!

GURTH. My name I told him, and he told me his—

It was as long as charity; it breaks

The jaw to say it, so I have forgot.

[*In the distance, ELFREDA can be heard singing.*

Hear that Elfreda singing! By the Saints!

110 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

No gentleman will stoop to marry her,  
And she shall not stoop lower.

DRIDDA. Let her be.

You may be wise, Gurth, but you're foolish  
too—

Elfreda is Elfreda. Let her be.

*[As ELFREDA comes nearer, the words  
of the song are heard ; she enters  
singing ; she bears a branch of  
scarlet autumn berries and waves  
it as she sings.]*

ELFREDA (*singing*).

Deep in the woods the fairies dance

Merrily, merrily,

One—two—three !

Through the tree-boughs the moonbeams  
glance

Silverly, silverly,

Fairies to see.

III

## Healthily, healthily,

Four—five—six !

**Then to the herds the fairies creep**

## Stealthily, stealthily,

**Up to their tricks.**

GURTH (*severely*). Sing not of neat-herds—  
they are lowly folk.

DRIDDA (*softly, that GURTH may not hear*).

**Vex not thy father with remembering ;**

Men like to rise by what they have forgot.

(*Aloud.*) Where hast thou been, sweet Mis-  
chief?

ELFREDA.

**In the woods.**

GURTH (*crossly*). The woods—the woods—  
for evermore the woods !

What would the great King say to your mad  
pranks ?

112 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

When will you learn to spin ?—

The wedding smock  
Is woven by your mother, and men mark  
Your beauty !

ELFREDA (*lifting her finger and speaking softly*). Father ! I am fast asleep.

GURTH. What means this nonsense ?

ELFREDA (*laughing*). Ask Sir Cornewulf,  
Cup-bearer to the King.

GURTH. Cup-bearer ?—King ?—

DRIDDA (*tenderly*). What whimsies wild run  
riot in your head ?

GURTH. Whimsies or whimsies not—'tis  
time for her

To wed ; she is a woman—fully grown—

DRIDDA (*interrupting*). Let her be virgin  
longer, Gurth, I pray ;

A woman's burden weighs when she is wed.

GURTH. Come, Dridda, stop your mouth  
with honey-mead,

And teach Elfreda no fool tattle-stuff.

Elfreda, wait me here—

[GURTH *and* DRIDDA *go out by the*  
*closed door.*

ELFREDA. No solemn speech shall spoil  
these joyous days ;

Better it pleases me to hear the birds  
Sing nesting - songs than talk of wedding  
smocks.

Heigh-ho for fun ! A jocund trick to play !  
'Tis merriment to watch the puzzled frown  
On father's forehead, hear his muttered  
words—

They sound like thunder,—but I see the  
bow !—

In this old wall I found a tiny door ;  
It lies concealed in this dark corner, here.

[*Going to the corner at the left.*

A thin-edged board is loose, and one light touch  
Opens the secret. Like a little rat

H

114 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

I entered, yesterday, the opening;  
I found a tiny passage—there I'll hide.  
Was it not made in very sooth for me?  
When father comes I'll imitate the birds;  
The while he ponders, I will run to kiss  
Away the frowning. What if stranger comes?  
I will hide close till he be gone again.  
Open—O little door—Elfreda's here.

[ELFREDA *presses open a board in the wall and, stepping in, closes it behind her; all is silent in the empty Hall.*

SCENE IV

*An ancient house in Cornwall, used by the KING as the Royal Residence during the hunting season*

*The QUEEN'S Chamber*

*The same day, at the same hour as last Scene  
A large room hung with tapestries; in one corner, a wide bed curtained with rich hang-*



*ings; various tables and seats stand about the room. There is a door to the right, one to the left, and one directly in the centre of the wall. The QUEEN is seated before a low table, filled with the numerous toilet-articles used by a Saxon lady of rank in the ninth century. The QUEEN wears a long, loose robe, and her beautiful hair falls over her shoulders; NUMANERA is combing it and, drawing it through her fingers, holds it up to the light admiringly.*

NUMANERA. Lady, if noble men of Rome were here—

ELSWITHA (*smiling*). And if they were?

NUMANERA. They would approach the Queen

As men approach Minerva, half in awe  
But all in reverent worship at her feet.  
The sunshine captive in these curls, my  
Queen,  
This beauty, this Aurora loveliness,

116      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Seem not for mortals, as the men of Rome  
Know mortal women in the land of Rome.

'Tis pity that the mighty King has set  
So many duties for his candled hours.  
He has short time, in his affairs of state,  
To play with roses—

ELSWITHA (*coldly*). Have a care—you pull  
My tresses ; move the comb more gently, girl.

NUMANERA. Pardon, O gracious queen—  
short time to chase  
This golden sunshine—ay, but kings are  
kings !

ELSWITHA (*sharply*). Yea, kings are kings  
—and serving-maids are maids,  
And not to speak of kings. Now, curl my  
hair.

[NUMANERA *drops the comb as if by  
accident ; stooping to pick it up,  
she lets something fall from her  
bosom ; she starts, assumes great*

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 117

*confusion, and, with much show of  
apparent secrecy, hides it again ;  
her movements attract the QUEEN'S  
notice, as NUMANERA intends.*

ELSWITHA. What ails you, girl ? What is  
it that you hide

In manifest confusion in your breast ?

NUMANERA (*aside, but loudly enough to be  
heard*). The Saints in heaven be praised !  
She saw it not.

ELSWITHA. Make not a tragedy of comedy ;  
I care not for your secrets—I but asked  
For pleasantness.

NUMANERA (*in assumed confusion*). The  
secret is not mine ;  
It is—it is—the King's.

ELSWITHA (*holding out her hand*). Give me  
the thing.

[*With apparent reluctance, NUMANERA  
hands to the QUEEN a waxen model  
of an ornament.*

118 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ELSWITHA (*aside*). Alfred! His name—  
his Saint—our flower memorial!

(*Aloud.*) What is this?—Speak—

NUMANERA (*shrugging her shoulders*). 'Tis  
not for serving-maids to speak of  
kings.

ELSWITHA (*aside*). I must not strike the  
viper till I know.

(*Aloud.*) You've learned your lesson well;  
here is another one—

'Tis not for serving-maids to hesitate;  
Whence came this waxen bauble? Answer  
me!

NUMANERA (*in a voice of terror*). I fear the  
dreadful anger of my Queen.

ELSWITHA. Then speak more quickly, that  
you see it not.

NUMANERA (*sweetly*). I would not hurt my  
royal mistress—nay,  
I would defend her from a stinging pain.

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 119

ELSWITHA (*aside*). God—how she taunts me!

(*Aloud.*) Listen to me, girl,  
I wait to hear the story of this toy,  
Where you have found it, wherefore hidden  
it—

And I will wait no longer.

NUMANERA (*slowly, but watching the QUEEN  
slyly from beneath her lowered eyelashes*).  
Lady—I—

I have a brother called Cesario—

ELSWITHA. What's that to me? Make  
haste to tell the tale.

NUMANERA. He who makes haste in  
marshes oft is lost.

ELSWITHA (*aside*). The very demons trick  
me in this girl!

NUMANERA. My brother is no stranger to  
the Queen;

From Rome he came with me—

120      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ELSWITHA. Once have I said I would not  
longer wait.

NUMANERA. My brother, who is named  
Cesario,  
Doth fashion gold like one from Heaven  
endowed  
With magic. By his handicraft he brings  
A lifeless jewel into life. The King  
Called for Cesario and gave to him  
This fair design which he—the King—had  
wrought,  
With strict command to copy it with care  
In gold and glowing colours, like a rose.  
Ah what a skilful artist is the King!  
Lady—is it not marvellously wrought?  
Here is the flower—

ELSWITHA (*interrupting*). I hear the story!  
—I have seen the thing.

NUMANERA. Twice hath the moon been  
rounded since the King

Gave this design unto Cesario.  
 To-night, he carries, with a conscious pride,  
 The golden jewel, finished, to the King ;  
 Lady, it is more beautiful than this  
 By so much as a flower is lovelier,  
 When colour quickens it, than in the green.  
 I begged Cesario to let me gaze  
 Upon this model for his handicraft—  
 I would contemplate a great King's design  
 And think myself at home in doing so ;  
 In Rome, such bits of beauty are the lot,  
 The common daily lot, of every eye.  
 Cesario, as ever, trusted me ;  
 He handed me this beautiful design ;  
 Then, as I held it, I was summoned here,  
 And thrust it in my bosom. There's the tale.

ELSWITHA (*coldly*). 'Twas well you dropped  
 it. I will keep the wax—  
 A King's designs are not for casual eyes.  
 I will return it to my lord the King.

122      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

NUMANERA (*apparently much agitated*). My  
Queen—O nay—Be merciful to me !  
The King—Cesario—the jewel—the King—

ELSWITHA. Where are your wits ? What  
doth this mumbling mean ?

NUMANERA. The King hath private purpose  
for the jewel ;  
He told Cesario—my brother said—  
O Lady, he—

ELSWITHA (*sharply*). What said he ? Must  
I shake  
The stupid words from out those stuttering  
lips ?

NUMANERA (*insinuatingly*). The King said  
it was destined for a gift.

ELSWITHA. A gift ? So be it—Kings are  
wont to give.

NUMANERA (*slyly*). My brother said the  
gift was for a maid,  
To whom the King hath granted rich estates—



A Saxon maid—O she is beautiful !

I met her in the woods and talked with her.

Her artless prattle of the King—

ELSWITHA (*in icy tones*). My hair is not yet  
braided—you are slow,

And twice the comb was tangled in a curl ;

Your hands are over-rough for royalty.

(*Calling.*) Edmora !—

[*The head of the QUEEN'S household  
enters and makes a low reverence.*

Send me a softer-handed maid, and one

With honest Saxon blood within her veins ;

Take hence this alien Roman from my sight—

Put her from out the Castle and the Court.

[EDMORA and NUMANERA go out  
*together.*

[ELSWITHA rises ; she looks at the  
*model, turning it over and over in  
her hand.*

His Saint—his name—his sign—Yea ! It is  
true !

124      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Since that strange day—when I beheld those  
eyes,

Like summer blue-flowers, turned upon my  
lord ;

Since he endowed a neat-herd with estates  
Because he had a daughter—all my heart  
Has vibrant been to echoes.

Am I mad ?—

No !—It is false—false—false—I never liked  
This Roman with unblinking serpent-eyes ;  
In steady leash suspicion I will hold,  
Lest I should do my lord a wicked wrong.  
But—Ah—The torment bites !—Alfred—my  
lord—

My husband—O art thou like other men ?  
Great God in Heaven—THOU ?

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*Again the QUEEN'S Chamber. Two hours after  
the last Scene*

*Daylight has faded and the room is lighted by hanging lamps. The door in the centre of the wall now stands open. A transverse corridor, dimly lighted, passes the door; on the other side of this corridor, and directly opposite the QUEEN'S door, hangs an arras; this covers the private door leading to the apartments of the KING. The QUEEN stands at the door of her own chamber; she is resplendent in beautiful garments. Her hair is curled, and a wreath of roses is wound among the curls.*

ELSWITHA. Suspensions are the pest of  
petty minds,

126      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

And doubts are bats which fly but in the  
night

To disappear at sunrise ; mine have flown  
In the glad radiance of my risen love.  
My Truth-teller ! Did I a moment doubt  
The virtuous honour of thy sovereign soul ?  
Rather I doubt the Saints in Paradise.  
Forgive me, Alfred, if the bat's wing cast  
Its ugly darkness o'er my thought of thee !  
There is his chamber—there my door to him ;  
And this—his door to me. O happy doors  
That let in love ! To-night, he hath no time  
For dalliance or for amorous delight.  
To-morrow morn, the Cornwall Hunt begins ;  
Now are there grave affairs of State, he said.  
Steward of God, my King may well be called ;  
He takes no pleasure till his task is done,  
And, ere he rides to-morrow to the Hunt,  
He serves the State with all fidelity.  
From Winchester the Bishop came, to-day,

With many parchment-weighted monks, to  
talk

Of some momentous matter with the King ;

Now to the Monastery they have gone,

And Alfred waits, alone, their quick return.

I will surprise his solitude—I wear

The garments he has often well approved,

Silk-sewn and rosy-coloured, interwrought

With broideries of gold. My curls are twined

With fragrant roses. I will challenge him

To steel his Spartan heart against my plea

For one dear moment of delightsomeness

In whispered word——

Mother of God ! What is it that I see ?—

*[The arras, covering the door leading to  
the KING'S apartment, opens and  
ELFREDA comes out; she does not  
see the QUEEN, in the shadow of her  
chamber, and stands for a moment  
against the arras, which has fallen  
behind her ; she looks to the right*

*and to the left as though to be sure  
that the corridor is free. The  
QUEEN swiftly crosses the corridor,  
and lays her hand over ELFREDA'S  
mouth.*

ELSWITHA. Hush!—Make no sound or I  
will strangle you.

Come farther from the arras.

*[The QUEEN drags ELFREDA into her  
own chamber and closes the door.*

Now—speak soft.

What calling had you, Base-born, there,  
within

The chamber of the King? I am the Queen.  
Confess — or, by the Mass! you shall be  
slain

By these two hands that hold you.

ELFREDA. O my Queen!

I pray you, let me go—I meant no harm.

ELSWITHA. Go?—I will let you go when  
from my head

I pluck out my two eyes for pastime.

Go?—

I will let you go when the blue sky is green

And all the earth is azure. Answer me :

Why were you in the chamber of the King?

ELFREDA. Lady, I sought the King—I  
came to him—

I came—God teach me what to say!

ELSWITHA. Silence!

God is no Master to teach lies. You came—

That fact is manifest enough to me—

But wherefore came you?

ELFREDA. I was sent, Lady!

ELSWITHA. Sent?—And by whom?

ELFREDA. By God, I think.

ELSWITHA. Silence!

You whitewashed sepulchre! It is a lie.

If you were sent by God, you would make  
haste

To justify your purpose to the Queen.

I

130      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ELFREDA. O Queen! I may not; it belongs to God,  
And to the King.

ELSWITHA. Incarnate lie! You went—  
Nay, I'll not sully royal lips to speak  
The shame of it.

*[The QUEEN points to the door at the right.]*

Look you at yonder door!  
It leads into a dungeon.

*[ELFREDA gives a little cry of fear.]*

Hush—no sound!  
You need not struggle, for my arm is strong.

*[The QUEEN tears off her silken girdle  
and binds ELFREDA'S mouth.]*

*ELFREDA does not struggle.*

There—I have silenced her. And if, perchance,  
Upon her pouting lips, should linger still  
Warm kisses, this my girdle wipes them off.



[*The QUEEN drags ELFREDA to the door  
at the right, holding her with one  
hand, while with the other hand  
she opens a stout door; a dark  
passage is seen.*

ELSWITHA. Behold that passage! And beyond, that door!

Within is darkness—cold—and certain death;  
And here, without, is light and living warmth.

If I unbind your mouth will you confess—  
Tell me what led you to the Royal Room,  
Tell me what passed between you and the  
King?

You cannot speak, but I can read your  
sign;

You need but move your hand to signify  
Your yes to me; I will unbind your mouth  
To hear you; peradventure, should I find  
That you were justified in the event  
I will not punish you. I wait the sign.

132 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

My God ! She makes no move—she will not  
speak—

She is convicted by her sullenness.

Know you what meets the daughter of a churl,

When she presumes defiance to a queen ?

[*The QUEEN turns ELFREDA's face to  
the light.*

Once let me look at her—are her eyes blue ?

No, they are grey as any rain-washed stone.

Is her hair “sun-kissed” ?—as he once called  
mine ;

No, it is colourless as stupid flax.

[*The QUEEN takes ELFREDA down the  
dark passage.*

Great God ! I have her fast—Go in !

SCENE II

*The following day : noon. A forest in Cornwall.*

*A glade : in the background, the open country  
with a lovely view of distant hills. A broad*

*stream runs from left to right ; large old trees grow upon the banks of the stream and in the foreground. To the left, a path leads to a hunting-hut ; to the right, the edge of a dense wood borders on the foreground ; in the background to the right, the land rises toward the open country. By walking to the edge of the wood and over the rising ground to a knoll may be seen the eastern view, which is hidden from the foreground by the dense wood. The KING'S servants are spreading a repast beneath the trees, by the side of the stream. CORNEWULF, CEDRIC, and others are talking while they await the KING, who has stopped at the hunting-hut.*

FIRST COURT. Thank God ! The happy  
hunting-tide hath come !

I feel my limbs grow lusty, once again,  
After the weariness of endless peace ;  
No battles make of man a puny thing.

134      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

The dreary Court hath been since Atheldun  
Duller than any graveyard on wet days.

CORNEWULF. Dull—do you find it dull ?

FIRST COURT.                      Yawningly dull,

Sir Pick-me-up !—

CORNEWULF.      And wherefore is it dull ?

Nothing stands still ;

'Tis movement, motion, new things every-  
where.

FIRST COURT. Give me the old things—  
they were merrier.

Give me the roistering days of old, when men  
Could eat and drink and sing a lusty song.

CORNEWULF. They drink enough to-day,  
God wot, and sing

Songs that make blush the angels. Must a man  
Eat till his leathern thong has burst to prove  
His gaiety—and drink till hiccoughs drown  
The minstrel's melody to prove his wit ?  
Wit is not wit that wallows in the mire ;

Wit is the brightness of the spirit's play,  
 With fine discernment making laughter well  
 Deep in the soul to warm it. Gaiety  
 Is sunshine's self that sparkles in the heart.

FIRST COURT. (*interrupting*). By Peter's  
 staff! You have a lengthy tongue  
 And wag it like a clapper. Where's the fool?

[MONFICHET *comes from the hunting-hut.*

MONFICHET. Look in the glass, my lord.

FIRST COURT. I looked this morning and  
 saw Wisdom's self.

MONFICHET. There is no folly in the whole  
 wide world  
 Can equal Folly dressed in Wisdom's garb.

FIRST COURT. Sir Impudence—why call  
 you me a fool?

MONFICHET. First, you're a courtier—  
 then, you are ambitious.

FIRST COURT. I grant the first impeach-  
 ment, but the last—

MONFICHET. Finds you in a most narrow  
strait 'twixt two.

If you admit it, then it stands a truth ;

If you deny it, straightway it is proved. .

SECOND COURT. Come—little crooked man,  
make sport for us !

MONFICHET. The other way, my masters,  
it is you

Who make the merry sport for Monfichet ;

Things contradict their seeming oftentimes.

You laugh at me because I'm called a fool—

And prove yourselves the fool that I am called.

ALL. Impudence !

MONFICHET. Tell me, my masters, which  
do you prefer—

A crookèd purse, well filled with honest gold,

Or a straight pig-skin, measured by the rule,

And counterfeit therein ?

SECOND COURT.      Good gold, forsooth !  
What matter howsoever it be held ?

MONFICHET. You have admitted in the  
metaphor

That my crooked frame is but of small  
account.

FIRST COURT. And do you dare to call us  
counterfeit ?

You little broken-backed deformity !

MONFICHET. I call you naught ; you stand  
for what you are,

Or what you are not—as the case may be.

FIRST COURT. Your damnèd insolence goes  
far—too far ;

Sirrah—remember unto whom you speak.

MONFICHET. I speak to dust and ashes—  
what of that ?

CEDRIC. You speak to lords, to Ealdormen,  
and Thanes.

MONFICHET. And who am I ?—I am your  
kinsman, sir.

SECOND COURT. Art thou a bastard ?

138      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

MONFICHET. All men are bastards if they  
were begot

In loveless wedlock, but my princely claim

Is an eternal claim, for I am son

Of the great King of Heaven ; wherefore I  
stand

Your brother.

ALL. Brother ! Hear the fool ! Ha ! Ha !

FIRST COURT. He has turned preacher and  
of Sunday smells.

MONFICHET. There's where the fool is wiser  
than the wise.

Straight in your bodies, strong in circum-  
stance,

You favour devils Monday, Tuesday, yea—

Wednesday and Thursday, Saturday as well,

And crawl to God on Sunday, and, perchance,

Remember Him on Friday. I'm the same

Sundays and every day. If I forget

To say my Pater Nosters at the Mass,



When Sunday comes, yet I remember God  
On week-days.

CORNEWULF. If you remember God  
How dare you be the sinner that you are ?

MONFICHET. I am an honest sinner, at the  
worst.

I hear men wailing, whining at God's feet,  
Bemoaning their intolerable sins,  
Beseeching mercy for the grievous load,  
And ere the echo dies upon the air  
They from their Pharisaic knees arise  
And, smiling, sin the same sweet sin again.

*[Looking around critically.]*

I know a man who loudly keeps the Law  
And the Commandments with a trumpet  
blast,  
As he goes in and out his castle gate,  
His garments glistening o'er with sprinkled  
drops  
Of holy water ; but when darkness falls,

He hastens slyly to the postern gate  
To meet the devil by appointment there.

FIRST COURT. (*interrupting*). I would the  
priest were here to sprinkle us  
To save us from the devil of your tongue !

MONFICHET (*laughing maliciously*). Fear  
not, my noble lord, I meant not you ;  
Where would my manners be ?

FIRST COURT. Here comes the King ! We  
must be solemn now.

MONFICHET. How far from comprehending  
that great heart !  
How blind ye are ! There is no man at  
Court

Loves honest laughter better than the King—  
Laughter that hath a breath of morning in it ;  
Your laughter smacks of smut, my lords.

SECOND COURT. And yours ?

MONFICHET. I am a fool and feel myself  
at home

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 141

On dung-heaps and upon the mountain-  
side ;

The King likes best the summit—life is  
choice.

But yesterday I heard him say these words :

*" 'Tis therein that you differ from the beast ;*

*You have within your soul the will to choose." \**

[ALFRED comes from the hut : he  
pauses a moment and looks search-  
ingly at the woods to the right : he  
glances at the feast spread under  
the trees and, seeing that the pre-  
parations are not completed, he  
seats himself on a large fallen tree,  
overgrown with moss. The COUR-  
TIERS gather about him.

ALFRED. Here we will sit beside the laugh-  
ing burn

Beneath the trees to rest awhile. The sun,  
Still upward climbing, marks not noontide yet.

\* King Alfred's own words. See Appendix.

142      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Behold the wondrous scene before us spread !  
The distant hills are beautifully blue,  
They lie at peace in the autumnal haze ;  
The yellowing trees glow golden in the light ;  
Who would abide in houses made with hands !  
Castles are prisons of necessity,  
And walls are barriers unto the soul.  
Our Lord is the supremest Architect.  
Behold this perfect mansion roofed by heaven,  
With living arches that upreach to God !  
Sing—Hunters ! Sing the merry hunting-  
                  song !  
Let the woods ring !

[*The COURTIERs sing, ALFRED joining  
in the singing of the first verse.*]

THE COURTIERs (*singing*).

Ho ! Ho ! Quoth the King,  
At the hunting-tide,  
Let the wild woods ring  
As we ride—ride—ride

Over the moorland, over the lea,  
Through Cornwall Forest fast and free !

Blow, Hunter, blow !

To the morning wind.

There are stags in the Forest

Many-tined.

Ho ! Ho ! For the hunt

Of the hart and the hind !

The Court and the King,

At the hunting-tide,

Make the wild woods ring

As they ride—ride—ride.

They ride to East and they ride to West,

Ever the King rides first and best !

Blow, Hunter, blow !

To the morning wind.

The stag in the Forest

Who shall find ?

Ho ! Ho ! 'Tis the King

Has the hart and the hind !

*[A man comes hurriedly from the wood and kneels before the KING. He has shifty eyes and a mouth indicating cruelty; he is GUNERUNG, the Dane. ALFRED does not rise; he keeps his position of careless ease, but fixes his gaze upon GUNERUNG, watching him closely.]*

GUNERUNG. Justice—O King!

ALFRED. Speak! In the name of Justice we would rule.

GUNERUNG. Sir King, there is a patch of wooded land

There, to the eastward. It is mine by right,  
But a contentious neighbour maketh claim  
The stream, that cuts our boundaries like a  
blade,

Is his, the water his, and all the fish—

The many fish therein—are his alone.

Now this stream turneth southward with a  
curve

To cross the boundary upon my side ;  
 I hold this gives me claim upon the stream,  
 And, also, upon all that therein is.  
 If but the King had in his ample mind  
 The just conditions of the boundary,  
 He could decide the question and avoid  
 An endless strife 'twixt neighbours.

Gracious King,

Beyond the line of the concealing wood  
 The low ground rises ; there, the countryside  
 May be discerned—my boundary and his—  
 Sir, deign to go with me and turn your eyes,  
 You will confer an endless benefit.  
 I crave kind pardon from thee, mighty King,  
 That I so far forget the dignity  
 Encompassing a sovereign, I should dare  
 Beseech my lord to walk a pace or two  
 And turn his head for such a lowly one.

ALFRED. Our royal dignity lies not in form,  
 Nor flatterer's remembrance of a crown ;

K

Our kingship is not compassed by a rule ;

I am the father of my people, glad

To minister to all—both low and high.

(*Rising.*) You are my subject—I will go with  
you.

Lead on.

GUNERUNG (*stepping aside with feigned  
humility*). After the King, I follow, sir.

ALFRED (*severely*). Go first — before the  
hunter runs the hound !

[*The KING and GUNERUNG walk to the  
right.*

A COURTIER (*aside to CORNEWULF*). The  
King is over-gracious to the Danes ;

He stoops to humour them.

CORNEWULF (*aside to COURTIER*). He con-  
quers them—

He who can conquer best may humour most.

[*The KING and GUNERUNG have now  
reached the knoll; the KING stands  
facing GUNERUNG.*



GUNERUNG (*pointing behind the KING*). Sir  
King, my land lies yonder—to the east.

[*The KING does not turn his head.*]

ALFRED (*calmly*). There is a little place  
beneath the bone

In a man's back that lets the dagger through  
To still the heart—and if my heart were stilled  
What would it profit you?

GUNERUNG (*nervously*). My lord—Sir King  
—I know not what you mean.

ALFRED (*with majesty, holding out his hand*).  
Give me the dagger destined for my  
back!

GUNERUNG (*surprised and confused*). Dagger  
for thee—O King!

[*GUNERUNG looks furtively around,  
contemplating flight; the KING  
seizes him.*]

ALFRED. Let the deep wolf-cave wait on  
us awhile!

148 KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

GUNERUNG (*aside*). Is he the King of  
Devils, who can see  
My mind, with those all-penetrating eyes?

[CORNEWULF, *who has seen the KING*  
*seize GUNERUNG, hastens to the*  
*spot, followed by the others.*

ALFRED (*delivering GUNERUNG to the Thanes*).

Within his doublet is a dagger hid  
To cut the Cord of England—search him  
well!

But see you harm him not—there is a word  
That I would say to him.

CORNEWULF.                      Our noble King  
Is gifted with a vision from on high.

CEDRIC. He reads men's purposes—fore-  
knows their deeds.

ALL. Treason! Treason!

[ALFRED *walks back to the fallen tree*  
*and sits while GUNERUNG is*  
*searched.*

ALFRED (*aside*). To die in valiant battle for  
the right

Is man's best fate, but to be foully stabbed  
By an assassin in the back—to die  
By treacherous hand, unshriven and uncon-  
fessed,  
That were a fate to make the staunchest pale.  
By grace of God I was forewarned, last night,  
Of this conspiracy—yet knew I not  
The moment nor the manner of the deed ;  
Close in the wolf-cave lurked the wretched  
Dane,  
With dagger for my back—this much, I knew,  
No more.

The while I sang the hunting-song  
I felt with prescient prick the dagger point,  
Yet must I still sing on and make no sign.  
'Tis written in the unwritten Code of Kings  
That we must walk unflinchingly the edge  
Of perilous danger with a steadfast smile,

150      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Must sing of life whiles men who hold for us  
Blood-dripping death are cowering behind.

*[The dagger is found.]*

FIRST THANE. The dagger ! Fires of hell !  
Our King's life-blood,  
Save for this miracle, would stain it now.

SECOND THANE. You devil-born ! But for  
the King's command,  
You should be ground to dust !

ALFRED (*aside*). Why do men hate us ?—  
We but do our part  
As each man does the part appointed him.  
We did not seek the burden, cannot lay  
The burden down, for we were born to it  
Who also are but servants of our Lord  
The King of kings. Deeper than any deed  
The hatred cuts—I will essay to change it.  
'Tis better to turn hatred into love  
Than seek a vengeance which belongs to God.

*[GUNERUNG is led to ALFRED.]*

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 151

ALFRED (*looking keenly at GUNERUNG*). Did  
you not swear allegiance to the King?

GUNERUNG (*sullenly*). When we were con-  
quered, then I took the oath  
As we were forced to take it—by the sword.

ALFRED. False coward, Judas-traitor, sunk  
so deep  
You could resort to this most damnable deed,  
To strike a friend when he has turned his  
back

To do you favour, could reward a gift  
With dagger and with death—O craven son  
Of noble Guthrum and a valiant race!

[*After a pause, ALFRED continues.*

A pity stirs within me for your soul—  
How very desolate that soul must be,  
Consumed with fires of hatred and of Hell!  
What is your name? I would remember it  
Henceforth in prayer.

GUNERUNG. My name is Gunerung.

152      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED. The doom of this deed, Gune-  
rung, is death.

'Twould need no doom to sentence you,  
false Dane,

If I but gave you to my followers.

In mercy I will save you from their wrath.

This treacherous act touches alone the King,  
And—I forgive you, as the Christ, our  
Lord,

Forgave His enemies.

GUNERUNG. Merciful sovereign! Is your  
God like that?

He were a God to worship if—

ALFRED (*sharply*). No *ifs*! Attend my  
word. There are no ifs.

You crawled here to my feet, petitioning  
A favour at my hand—you humbly sued  
That I should turn my eyes to service you,  
Holding the purpose to deal death to me  
In very act of service. I am man,

And I, as man, would lash you unto death,  
And hang on yonder tree your carrion foul  
For kites and vultures. That I do it not  
Proves that I am Christ's-man.

GUNERUNG (*aside*). What if his God be very  
God indeed !

Odin, the god of vengeance, ne'er forgave.  
Almost I am persuaded to believe.

### SCENE III

*The Royal Residence in Cornwall. KING  
ALFRED'S Chamber. Late afternoon of the  
same day*

*A spacious room, the sunset light coming through  
narrow windows. The room is hung with  
rich tapestries. Fur-skins are on the floor ;  
a large crucifix hangs upon the wall. There  
are many seats of different kinds ; many  
tables covered with parchments, rolls, boxes,  
numberless musical instruments, implements,*

*and other articles, showing the many-sided interests and activities of the KING. ALFRED has just entered the chamber; he is still in hunting-dress.*

ALFRED. Save for that child, I should be  
wandering now

In Death's vast silent meadow with the Shades.  
For me, what unimagined mysteries  
In that first dawn-break of eternity!  
For England's lady, what a piteous plight,  
What fall of human tears if they had brought  
Only an empty tenement of clay,  
When she came forth with glowing lips to  
meet  
Her lord returning!

Where now tarrieth she?

'Tis not her wont to leave me welcomeless.  
I sent my emissaries with dispatch  
To tell the story of to-day's event,  
Lest it should meet her inadvertently.



She comes—I know that proudly royal step,  
Touching the earth as though with winged  
feet.

ELSWITHA *enters ; she moves as in a dream ;  
her face is colourless.*

Thou art white, Elswitha, as the virgin snow  
When first it falls from chambers of the  
North.

Belovèd—art thou sick ?—Or weary ?—

Nay.

Am I not slow of wit ! It is thy fear  
Of death-fraught danger that o'ershadowed  
me,

The picture of my peril ; but that's past ;  
Flash forth thy smile and make November,  
May.

Put on the wedding raiment of thy soul,  
Thou art not widowed ; I am here to kiss  
Warm colour to the snow-drift, once again,

156      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

To banish from those terror-haunted eyes  
The picture of dark traitor-deeds.

*[From a box on the table ALFRED takes  
a beautiful jewel of gold and  
enamel. It is about two inches  
long, and resembles the waxen  
model which NUMANERA had shown  
to the QUEEN. The jewel is sus-  
pended from a long chain of  
wrought gold.]*

Behold !

Here is a jewel that I made for thee—  
A guerdon for thy birth-night festival—  
I will not keep it for the appointed hour,  
But let it serve a cheering purpose now,  
As medicine to moody memories  
Of the foiled tragedy, the stamped-out plot ;  
By thy grace, Lady, I will put it on ;  
I will essay to clasp it fittingly ;  
I am a soldier—and my hands are used  
To sword-grip, not to dainty services.

[ALFRED *clasps the chain around*  
 ELSWITHA'S *neck, then puts one*  
*arm lightly about her while, with*  
*the other hand, he lifts the jewel*  
*for ELSWITHA to examine.*

Is not the jewel fashioned well for one  
 Unskilled in handicraft?—Cesario  
 The Roman wrought the gold and coloured it,  
 But I first modelled the design in wax ;  
 It is my work, he did but copy it ;  
 I made it as a love-gift for my Queen.

ELSWITHA. My lord—

ALFRED. The name of Alfred curves the  
 circle here—

I would my name might lie upon thy breast—  
 And here, upon the gold is graven deep  
 Our flower of memory to whisper thee  
 Of unforgotten things ; here—blessing all—  
 The holy Saint who guards our life and home,  
 It is of many meanings eloquent,

158      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

As doth befit its destiny for one  
Who, in the circle of herself, combines  
All that is holiest and loveliest,  
Who meets both sides of manhood's requisite.  
Thou art the very flower of wifelihood.

ELSWITHA. My lord—

*[ELSWITHA has been standing as though turned to stone. ALFRED, standing beside her, and studying the jewel as he speaks, has not seen her face; she is very pale, and her eyes are as the eyes of one who walks in sleep. Suddenly, ELSWITHA, as though breaking the bondage of a trance, moves away from him.]*

ALFRED (*regarding her solicitously*). Paler  
than whiteness yet—and tremulous!—  
Where is thy fortitude? Thou need'st not  
fear  
The old imperilled days will come again;  
There will be no uprising of the Danes.

And have no fear for me—this Gunerung  
Is safer living than he would be dead.  
I did not tell thee all—the best is this,  
I saw the hatred die within his eyes  
When I forgave him, saw his enmity  
Turn to a look akin to friendliness.  
Perchance, he hath been won to Christ ; if  
he—

Then others will be won. Thus a dark deed  
May serve good purpose in Life's ordering.  
Fate granted me the advantage of the hour  
In that I was prepared to act. Last night,  
Elfreda—that most blessed girl of God—  
Came to my chamber, led by Cornewulf.  
Once here, she bade him go as princess  
might.

I smiled to see the love-proof Cornewulf  
Yielding obedience to a little maid.  
The sorry tale she told me with swift speech.  
In secret hiding in her father's Hall,

She overheard this miserable Dane,  
 Together with another traitor, plan  
 The foiled assassination of to-day.  
 With steady courage, and a larger mind  
 Than her slight frame betokens, she came  
       here

To give me warning—a courageous deed !  
 She well-divined the secret must be kept,  
 Her task must be accomplished without aid ;  
 Her loyal little heart dared all ; she came  
 Alone, through the deep forest in the dark,  
 And told her story with simplicity.  
 I then commanded her she speak no word  
 On pain of my displeasure.

*[As ALFRED speaks, ELSWITHA'S face  
       has grown more horror-stricken ;  
       wildly, she unclasps the chain and  
       holds it out to ALFRED.]*

ALFRED. Elswitha—Art thou mad ?

ELSWITHA. I would I were.

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 161

ALFRED (*taking the jewel from her hand tenderly*). My poor Elswitha—

ELSWITHA (*with a bitter cry*). I have sinned—beyond forgiveness !

[ELSWITHA *rushes from the room.*

ALFRED *sinks into a seat, covering his face with his hand. For a time there is silence in the room, then ALFRED lifts his head ; his face is changed as if suddenly aged.*

ALFRED. My God ! Hath life's unequalled anguish cast

Its darkest doom upon this house ? Am I,  
Like Arthur, stricken by the hand I ringed  
In holy sacrament of marriage bond ?  
Her baleful beauty drew me as the moon  
Draws the strong ocean to the change of  
tide ;

And if her soul was dearer unto me  
Than mine own soul's salvation, God is judge.

L

162      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Perchance, this doom was foreordained for  
that ;

It is my punishment. My human love  
Allured with rosy aureole mine eyes  
From gazing on the Cross. Yet, man is  
man ;

He cannot wear monk's habit on his heart  
Nor curb his passion with an hempen cord.  
She is mine own !—Mine own !

Where is the man  
Who hath defiled my bed ? Great God in  
Heaven !

She has *sinned* ? SINNED and "beyond for-  
giveness" ?—

Those words can have no meaning save the  
one !

My house is desolate—all desolate ;  
Nothing is left—I sit amid the ruins,  
And dark Despair sits in Elswitha's seat ;  
Deep in his cavernous eyes a mocking laugh



Confronts me when I turn to her old place,  
 From dear familiar habit of the mind ;  
 I have been robbed of all I valued most,  
 And in my children I shall daily see  
 Memorials of that which never was.  
 I have not even sacred Sorrow's balm ;  
 If she were dead and I could touch her hand,  
 Cold but yet pure—that were a benison ;  
 Then Memory would like a mother come  
 To assuage the bitter poignancy of pain ;  
 She hath not left me even memory—  
 Each kiss burns backward with a stinging  
     blow,

Each recollected hour becomes a pang.  
 Where is the man who hath defiled my bed ?

*[Rising and drawing his sword.]*

My sword in scabbard leaps to feel his blood  
 Upon its blade, his corpse beneath its point.  
 Across the world and over farthest seas  
 I will pursue him—I shall know his face

164      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

When once I look upon it—I will stamp  
That false adulterous visage in the dust—

[ELSWITHA *enters softly at the right*  
*and stands by the door.*

ELSWITHA. O Alfred—O my lord!—

ALFRED.                      Elswitha! Thou!—

ELSWITHA. Ere I forever leave the paradise

Of thy dear presence, ere the door be closed  
For evermore to shut me out from thee  
Into the darkness of eternal night,  
O let me look once more upon thy face,  
And feel thy hands once more upon my brow,  
Commending me to mercy and to God!  
My sin was great but it was born of love,  
My love for thee which led me to my sin.

ALFRED. Unhallowed words! Bring me  
no sounding brass;  
'Tis blasphemy to vaunt a holy past  
In this black shadow of a sin-stained now.

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 165

ELSWITHA. My lord, it was that past which  
made me sin.

ALFRED. Leave riddles—and speak plainer.  
Waste no words.

ELSWITHA. I am a murderess !—

ALFRED (*starting*). Ah ! Then—It was  
not—?

ELSWITHA. With wrath I slew in purpose  
and desire  
That blessèd maiden God hath sent to us  
As His best gift ;—twice hath she saved my  
lord.

ALFRED. Elfreda ?—Dead ?—

ELSWITHA. No ! For I rescued her—  
By God's grace, there was time. But in my  
heart

I slew her, and God saw the deed.

He spread  
His wings above her—left alone to die—  
That was His mercy—but my sin was sinned.

166     KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

I locked her in the dungeon ; there she lay  
Cold and alone in darkness—that frail flower !  
When from your presence in such haste I  
      sped

It was to her ! I thought it was too late—  
But there was still God's merciful Perchance.  
I sped as swiftly as the passing wind,  
I reached the dungeon and unbarred the  
      door—

She prostrate lay upon the death-damp stones ;  
But—thanks be unto God—she breathed !  
      She breathed !

And when I lifted her, she opened wide  
Her tender eyes, and when she knew my  
      heart,

She smiled forgiveness, as an angel might.

ALFRED. Wherefore, Elswitha, didst thou  
      do this thing ?

ELSWITHA. The fiend of jealousy possessed  
      my soul

And made my spirit stranger to myself.  
 I heard from Numanera, yesterday,  
 A wicked lie that flamed my heart and blood.  
 'Twas not alone her words that maddened

me,

But the unloosed thoughts that stirred again  
 From out their covert ; thoughts that chal-  
 lenged me

When first I saw Elfreda—when I knew  
 The King had dowered her with royal gifts.  
 A burning shame o'erwhelms me to confess  
 So dark a storm-cloud to your soul of light.

ALFRED (*lifting his hand protestingly*). O

hush ! My soul is dark—

ELSWITHA. I fought the doubts until sus-  
 picion died ;

With eager longing to atone for thoughts  
 You knew not of, I waited at the door  
 Of mine own chamber, on my way to you,  
 Communing with you in my sorry heart ;

168      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Then, lo ! Elfreda from your chamber came ;  
She stood before the arras, fair and white  
As a May lily on a sunny morn ;  
Upon her lips a joyous triumph shone  
As if to say, in whispers to herself,  
“ I have the happiness that I desired.”  
The blood within my veins was leaping flame !  
Swift as a tigress, hungry for her prey,  
I seized the girl and put the questions fast ;  
She answered not, or yet, in such a wise  
She fed suspicion, even as she spoke ;  
Then I knew naught but one blind seething  
    wrath ;  
The earth—the sky—the very air—became  
Hateful to me, and tremulous with red.  
With these my hands I could have strangled  
    her,  
And marred her beauty with these fingers save  
For you ; one fear of you welled underneath  
The wrath ; I could not kill her openly,

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 169

You might surprise me and behold the deed ;  
I dragged her to the dungeon, locked her in,  
And left her there to die.

The black night passed,  
I know not how ; the ghastly awful dawn  
Crept through the trees, and passed, I know  
not how ;

The blank day rose, and passed, I know not  
how ;

They told me of your danger, your escape,  
I heard and did not hear. You summoned  
me,

I came—or rather say, I moved like one  
Who sleeps in moving yet can never sleep.  
And then I *knew*—you said those words to  
me !

O Sir !—

I may not breathe the air you breathe,  
I am not worthy—I must go away  
To live a life of penitence and prayer.

170      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

ALFRED (*moving toward ELSWITHA*). Elswitha, God who made the heart of love  
Alone can comprehend the heart He made—  
He will forgive our sin—

ELSWITHA. *Our sin ?—*

ALFRED (*taking her hand, tenderly*). You  
need not go, beloved, far from me  
To pray, for I have sinned the sin you sinned,  
And I must pray with you the prayer you  
pray.

ELSWITHA. My lord—I do not hear your  
words aright !—

ALFRED. Elswitha, in the compass of this  
hour,

I trod the wine-press—knew Gethsemane.  
In all things man is tempted, like to like,  
And none need boast or vaunt himself, to-day,  
Not knowing the to-morrow nor the heart.  
When I forgave the Dane, I called myself  
Christ's-man—and even as I spoke, I fell.



The pitiable Gunerung assailed  
 Naught but my life—so easy to forgive!—  
 But when the poisoned arrow touched my  
     soul,

In that black moment, I forgot the Christ ;  
 Love-born, like yours, a murderous anger  
     flamed ;

Had it then found an outlet, it had done  
 The very deed of murder with a laugh.

*Man's soul is threefold : passion is one part.\**

Within my soul blazed passion's scorching  
     fire,

When, by your words, I thought you false  
     to me—

I thought you loved me not.

ELSWITHA.

I love you not ?

O thou who art the very fount and source  
 Of all my being ! Thou who art a man  
 To dower me with rapturous bliss beyond

\* King Alfred's own words. See Appendix.

172      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

The bridal dream of women, yet a star—  
My Morning Star of the resplendent East,  
That leads my wayward soul unto the  
Christ—

Do I not love thee? At thy feet I kneel.

[ELSWITHA *kneels*.

ALFRED (*raising* ELSWITHA). Not at my  
feet, Elswitha, on my breast,  
Thy bidding-place. And when thou kneel'st  
to God,  
I will kneel near thee. Lift thy face to  
mine

And let me drink renewal from thy lips,  
After the parching passion of my thirst.

[ALFRED *embraces* ELSWITHA ; *he then*  
*goes to the table and finds the*  
*jewel.*

And now, Elswitha, bend thy gracious head,  
And let me clasp, once more, around thy  
throat

KING ALFRED'S JEWEL 173

This golden circle ; let me lay, once more,  
My love-gift, Alfred-graven, on thy breast.

*[Clasping the chain around ELSWITHA'S  
neck.]*

Receive this jewel that I made for thee,  
For thee—my sweetheart, and the mother-  
bird

Of my young Edward.

*[Voices are heard singing, without.]*

THE VOICES.

Praise we the Lord of Hosts,  
He saved our King.  
Praise we the Lord of Hosts,  
Come, let us sing  
Glory to Thee,  
Glory to Thee,  
O God Most High !

ALFRED. Elswitha, we must yield our  
hour's delight ;

174      KING ALFRED'S JEWEL

Sovereigns are subject to their people's call ;  
We are the servants of our destiny ;  
We may not close the door to shut in love  
Nor be alone with rapture—we belong  
To England.

[ALFRED *goes to the door and opens it.*  
Welcome, Sir Bishop ! Greeting, in God's  
name !

*The BISHOP, the ABBOT, MONKS, COURTIERS,  
and others, enter.*

THE BISHOP. My noble son and my most  
excellent lord,  
We go to render thanks to God most high  
For His great benefits unto this realm.  
He, in His mercy, turned aside the hand  
That basely struck at our anointed King.  
The Lord Omnipotent hath compassed thee  
With angels, Alfred, saving thee from death  
To serve His holy Church upon the earth ;

Full worthily for her thou hast performed  
High service hitherto, my worthy son.

[*As the BISHOP speaks the last words,*  
ALFRED *kneels.*

ALFRED. Most reverend sir, I am a mortal  
man ;  
I do what I may do but by God's grace.

[*Rising.*

Lead on, Sir Bishop, we will follow you  
To render thanks.

[*The BISHOP, MONKS, COURTIERs, et*  
*cetera, go out. In the distance,*  
*voices are heard singing.*

ALFRED. Elswitha ! Come, my Queen,  
Now we will kneel together, side by side.



## APPENDIX

### I (*page 52*)

"BUT I desired instruments and materials to carry out the work I was set to do, which was that I should virtuously and fittingly administer the authority committed unto me.

"Now no man, as thou knowest, can get full play for his natural gifts, nor conduct and administer government, unless he hath fit tools, and the raw material to work upon. By material I mean that which is necessary to the exercise of natural powers; thus a king's raw material and instruments of rule are a well-peopled land, and he must have men of prayer, men of war, and men of work. As thou knowest, without these tools no king may display his special talent."

*King Alfred's Version of The Consolations of Boethius. Done into Modern English by Walter John Sedgefield, Litt.D. (page 41).*

II (*page 79*)

“ ALL men and all women on earth  
Had first their beginning the same,  
Into this world of their birth  
All of one couple they came :

“ Alike are the great and the small ;  
No wonder that this should be thus ;  
For God is the Father of all,  
The Lord and the Maker of us.

. . . . .

“ Well-born alike are all folk  
Whom He hath made under the sky ;  
Why then on others a yoke  
Now will ye be lifting on high ?

“ And why be so causelessly proud,  
As thus ye find none are ill-born ?  
Or why, for your rank, from the crowd  
Raise yourself up in such scorn ?



“In the mind of a man, not his make,  
In the earth-dweller's heart, not his rank,  
Is the nobleness whereof I spake,  
The true, and the free, and the frank.”

*Complete Works of King Alfred the Great.  
Jubilee Edition (page 208).*

III (*page 141*)

“AND lo! ye have something divine in your souls,  
even Reason and Memory, and the discerning Will  
to choose.”

*King Alfred's Version of The Consolations of  
Boethius. Done into Modern English by  
Walter John Sedgefield, Litt.D. (page 31).*

IV (*page 171*)

“I SAID the soul was threefold because philo-  
sophers affirm that it hath three natures. One of  
these natures is to be subject to desire, the second  
to be subject to passion, and the third that it is  
rational. Two of these qualities are possessed by

beasts in the same way as by men, namely, desire and passion; no creature, save man alone, hath reason, and therefore he hath excelled all earthly creatures in forethought and sense. Reason must control both desire and passion, for it is a special virtue of the soul."

*King Alfred's Version of The Consolations of Boethius. Done into Modern English by Walter John Sedgefield, Litt.D. (page 90).*



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